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BY ANNIE THOMAS



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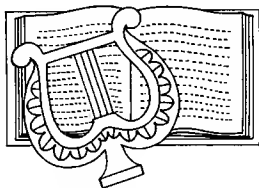
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BEST FOR HER.

A Novel.

BY

ANNIE THOMAS

(MRS. PENDER CUDLIP),

AUTHOR OF 'DENNIS DONNE,' 'PLAYED OUT,' 'CALLED TO ACCOUNT,'
'LYRE OF BLENDON,' ETC.

London:

WARD, LOCK AND CO.

LONDON: WARWICK HOUSE, SALISBURY SQUARE, E.C.

NEW YORK: 10, BOND STREET.



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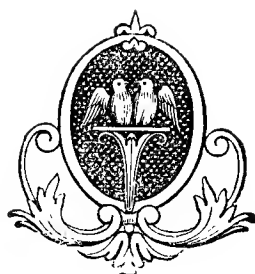
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BEST FOR HER.

CHAPTER I.

IN CAVENDISH SQUARE.

‘To tell the truth, my father thinks Robert has been very extravagant in establishing himself here, and leaving such a practice as he had at Walton. And you know how intolerant he is to anything like extravagance.’

The speaker is a good-looking girl of two or three and twenty, large, long, and lissom-limbed, a young lady who does justice to the close-fitting dresses of the day, and can hold her own satisfactorily on any lawn-tennis ground.

She is a little affected in manner, or rather it should be said that she lacks the ring of reality, and she ‘tells the truth’ in the words quoted above in tones that make one sceptical.

‘If hard work and assiduous attention to his patients go for anything, Robert will command success; and as for the house, it is for *you* he has taken and furnished it, you know, Marian! Your father ought not to be too intolerant.’

It is the sister of the ‘Robert’ under discussion who says this, and the one to whom she makes reply is Marian Lepell, the bride-elect of Robert Annesley, a clever young surgeon

who has recently given up his practice at Walton-on-Thames, and bought one in the neighbourhood of Cavendish Square.

‘Oh ! I like the house well enough ; don’t take up the idea that I am discontented with it or with anything else that Robert gets or does for me,’ Marian says coldly, for it is not according to her notion of the fitness of things that anyone should correct her as to any opinions she may choose to hold about Robert, her own peculiar property ; ‘but you can hardly wonder at my not being elated at the prospect of leaving Walton. I looked forward to living there for years to come, having mamma and the girls close by ; near enough for us to be together every day would have been so pleasant — now, here I shall be quite alone.’

Miss Annesley feels that a faint colour mounts to her brow as her future sister-in law says this, for it is in the projected order of things that she (Dolly) is to continue to live with her brother, and now his wife that is to be appears to be ignoring this arrangement.

‘Worse than alone, in fact,’ Marian goes on, in her low, sweet, unemphatic tones, ‘for Robert is sure to get into a circle of stiff professionals, and I shall have the trouble of entertaining them at dull dinner-parties without any help from mamma and the girls.’

‘Perhaps I shall be able to help you,’ Dolly says reassuringly ; and then something like a feeling of contempt for the well-mannered puerile grumbler seizes her, and she adds—

‘At any rate, I can’t regard your grievance as a serious one. If you preferred your mother and the girls to Robert you needn’t have taken him ; now that you have taken him you ought to think more of his interests and less of leaving Walton.’

‘Ah ! yes, of course, you would be ready to go into heroics and the wilderness with the man of your heart,’

Marian says, with a slight sneering smile ; 'there's none of that sort of "Wherever-thou-art-would-seem-Erin-to-me" sentiment about me. Mamma says I shall find this plush furniture will wear vilely ; I almost wish I had persuaded Robert against it.'

'Come and see the other rooms now they're finished, they look so different to what they did the other day,' Dolly cries, jumping up, heartily glad of the change of topic, and eager to lead the future mistress of it over the perfectly appointed house. But Miss Lepell has no fancy for making an informal progress over her new demesne.

'Where is Robert ? I'll wait for him to take me over the house, I think ; as I wrote to tell him I should come up to lunch with you to-day he might have been at home to see me.'

'I thought I told you he had been called to a consultation?'

'So you did, but that doesn't last all day, I suppose ; it's half-past three now ; I can't wait about for him all day. Tell him I think the house and furniture would be perfect if they were down at Walton or Weybridge ; being in Cavendish Square I shall never take any interest in either.'

'I wouldn't give him such a disheartening message for the world,' Dolly cries indignantly. 'Poor, dear, *kind* Robert ! You'll surely never throw cold water on his enterprise in such a way, Marian?'

'Fortunately for him I shall frequently,' Miss Lepell says, quietly. 'His enterprises are apt to end expensively, and I shouldn't have a pleasant time of it with my own people if I were a poor, harassed, ill-dressed, care-worn wife and mother, and wanted help from them ; I mean to make Robert a careful man, Dolly ! He'll get no sympathy for any of his rash enterprises from me.'

Miss Lepell has been adjusting her hat, and drawing on her long many-buttoned gloves as she says this, preparing

to depart in her usual graceful unhurried way. Dolly, whose spirit has waxed impatient during the latter part of their interview, moves restlessly about the room, longing for relief from this unruffled but most ruffling presence—eager to be free to prepare some natural flower trimming for a dress she is going to wear this night at Lady Killeen's dance.

But her irreproachable oppressor has not quite done tantalizing her yet. While Marian is waiting for the cab which has been sent for to take her to the station, she says:

‘By-the-way, Dolly, are you seeing anything of the Killeens now? or are they too much occupied in London to have time to cultivate their Matlock friends?’

‘I have seen them once or twice, and I'm going to her dance to-night.’

‘Is Robert going?’

‘If he can manage the time.’

Miss Lepell's fair face tingles with a sudden blush, and her thin nostrils dilate and grow pink.

‘Is that girl with them still?’ she asks.

‘Miss Thynne? Yes; why, it's her home.’

‘Tell Robert I hope he'll enjoy himself with his fine friends to-night, and tell him also that Lord Killeen is the type of a man above all others of whom my father disapproves—an absentee Irish landlord, throwing away the money in London that he grinds out of his poor wretched tenants. Robert will never do any good in his profession if he gets intimate with such a man.’

She goes after having enunciated this sentiment, and, with a cry and a bound of joyous relief, Dolly gets herself into her own room, where large basins, full of perfect roses, crimson and cream, in full bloom and in bud, are waiting for her to sew them in bands and clusters on to the bodice and skirt of the ivory satin which is to be moulded

on to her splendid, pliant young form at a later period of the day.

Her task is a congenial one. She loves flowers, she likes becoming dress, and she wishes to do credit, by her appearance among his possible clients, to her clever, sanguine, loving brother. Accordingly, the bands and bouquets grow apace into most perfect form, and are sewn firmly on to every portion of the dress on which decoration is admissible. Her maid—a deft-handed girl with no views as to the prerogatives of her position as yet—aids her with the needle-and-thread part of the business when the roses are put into position, and the busy hum of everlastingly moving London comes in at the open window soothingly.

Dolly cannot help thinking a good deal about her own appearance to-night, and thrilling as she reflects that it will be a pleasing one; for the man who has asked her for the first waltz is a dear friend of many years' standing, and, latterly, Dolly and he have begun to feel that there can be but one end to such leal and loving friendship as theirs—not that they are engaged, but each feels sure that in all the world the other is the dearest. They have got to the stage of taking each other for granted, and Dolly is well justified in feeling that an engagement and a union for life will follow as a matter of course.

That he, Ronald Mackiver, is a soldier—a captain in a line regiment merely—is rather against him in Robert Annesley's professional eyes; but, on the other hand, the Mackiver family look smilingly upon Dolly, who has ten thousand pounds of her own, so the fors and againsts the probable match are fairly balanced.

Indeed, it is a difficult thing for any human being to look other than smilingly upon Dolly, without regard to her ten thousand pounds at all. If photographers, princes, and the

press could only get hold of her, she would be projected into the ranks of 'professional beauty' without delay.

As it is, she is merely a lovely girl in a limited circle, with hair of golden hue, and two eyes so soft and brown.

Her temper is golden too, bright and sunny, and she has a reserve fund of will and endurance that will make a good winter-weather friend for those with whom her lot is cast.

She is very young, only just twenty, and no special call has been made upon these latent powers of hers as yet. For the present her sorest trouble is that Marian Lepell—the handsome wife her brother has chosen to do credit to his career—appreciates herself and her own family more than she does Robert. The sister knows that Robert is as sensitive as he is sanguine, and with all her heart she wishes that his choice had fallen on one who would love him as unselfishly and unflinchingly as will the girl to whom Ronald Mackiver will by-and-by throw the handkerchief.

The wreaths, the breast-plate, the shoulder and throat bouquets, and bandeau for the handsome little head, all are completed by five o'clock, and Dolly is sipping her tea, feeling almost that she has earned it, when her brother drives up rapidly to the door in his neat brougham, and rushes up to the drawing-room in unprofessional haste.

'Dolly!' he cries, coming out panting to the landing, and, looking up the staircase, he sees her standing in her morning wrapper in the doorway of her bedroom.

'Such news for you, Dolly, dear!' he cries, leaping upstairs and confronting her with a face expressive of triumphant joy, and a manner that is full of enthusiasm and energy. 'Can you be ready to start for Ireland with me this evening? Yes, of course you can when I tell you that Killeen has offered me Darragh!'

Her first thought is that if she goes to Ireland to-night

she will miss meeting Ronald Mackiver, and how dear a meeting is to unacknowledged lovers no lovers who are 'unacknowledged' need be told. Her second is that if Robert wants her she must go with him, and the roses must fade unworn upon that perfect dress. It is a little hard, but there is no sign of feeling the hardship of it in the tone in which she says—

'Offered you Darragh ! To lend it to you do you mean ?'

'No, no ; to sell it to me. I'll tell you all about it by-and-by ; but get ready to start by six o'clock like a good girl. I want you to see the place, and then you'll understand what a magnificent investment it is. Such a chance comes but once in a lifetime.'

'Must we go to-night ? Lady Killeen's dance. Have you forgotten it ?'

'My dear Dolly, you're going to be frivolous for the first time in your life, and want to give up a tangible good for a dance ! Yes, yes ! I see ! the dress is charming. But we mustn't stay talking about it now ; I want your sagacious little head over there, my dear sister, and we must leave here by six o'clock.'

Then in a few words he explains to her that Lord Killeen, 'entirely through his own fault,' has alienated his tenants on the Darragh demesne, in Galway, and that consequently some little difficulty has arisen about the rents.

'The fact is Killeen has made a hash of it, has got disgusted with the place and the people, and so is ready to sell at an awful sacrifice. The property came into the family with his aunt, the late Lord Killeen's wife, and both the present man and his wife seem to regard it as a white elephant.'

'Why don't they give it to Miss Thynne if it belonged to

her mother?' Dolly asked bluntly; and Robert, as he turns away to order his portmanteau to be packed, replies—

'My dear child, I am not going to dig and delve into the reasons why Killeen has made me such a splendid offer; the place is a paradise. Just think of the days we'll have at Arranmore and on the Shannon, and——'

'But this house? and your practice? and Marian?' she cries, running a few steps after him.

'My dear bewildered Dolly, don't you see that it's quite possible that I may attend to all of them, even though I am an Irish landowner?' he replies good-temperedly, and in such a superior and convincing manner that Dolly only ventures to remark—

'Galway is further from Walton than Cavendish Square. Marian will feel herself exiled indeed if the Channel has terrors for "mamma and the girls."'

'We shall only be there a few months of the year—till the property becomes as grandly remunerative as I intend it to be; and Marian has such a clear judgment and so much calm firmness that she will be an invaluable aid to us in managing a rather wild and lawless set of people. As for you, Dolly, you're quite the girl for Galway. Now! you've only half-an-hour.'

He goes on his way buoyantly, and Dolly orders a few necessities into a small travelling trunk, and sees the flower-wreathed dress laid aside with a gallantly suppressed sigh. She does not believe that her brother is at all the man for Galway more than she is the girl for it. Still she has nothing tangible to urge against the scheme, and the thought of the Lepells' wrath when they come to hear of the transaction does not fill her with dismay.

'They love to think that Marian is coming down from her throne in marrying Robert, but they're good-hearted

people for all that, and it's only their love for her that makes them talk as if no one were good enough for her,' Dolly thinks, and then she dismisses Marian from her mind, and gives a few moments' consideration to what 'might have been' at Lady Killeen's dance to-night. When her brother comes down to swoop her off to the station he finds her writing these few lines to Ronald Mackiver :

'DEAR RONALD,

'Business takes Robert to Ireland to-night, and Robert takes me. Don't wait for me, therefore, but waltz with the nicest girl in the room. You shall hear directly I come back.

'Yours always,

'DOLLY ANNESLEY.'

'You're not telling Mackiver anything about Darragh, are you?' Mr. Annesley asks, as he glances at the address on the envelope.

'No ; why not, though ?'

'I prefer telling people I've done a thing to saying that I am going to do it. Now, dear, we're off.'

They catch their train, and are speeding away through the summer night air. Quaint, picturesque old Chester is passed, the valley of the Dee is rushed through, and Holyhead is gained before some of the guests reach Lady Killeen's house in Charles Street. Among these late arrivals is a man who has run up from Aldershot, and who fears that his detention by duty may cause him to appear a laggard in love in the eyes of Dolly Annesley.

His quick, searching glance flies round ball-room and conservatory, and fails to find her. Disappointed, but still, after the manner of men, disposed to make the best of

it, he looks about him critically. Dolly's note has not reached him, for the simple reason that he has not been to the hotel at which she has addressed him ; but unconsciously he follows her advice, and seeks to solace himself with the 'nicest girl' in her absence.

According to his idea, and he is not singular in holding it, this nicest girl is the cousin of his host, the Honourable Miss Thynne. A beauty of the real Irish type, vigorous, graceful, womanly, with a breath of childish wildness about her that is pure and sweet as mountain air.

Captain Mackiver is making his way towards her, marking her for his own for the next round dance, and approving thoroughly of the way in which her thick, long, black curly lashes shade her deep violet eyes, when he sees her whisked off by another man. So, being arrested in his course by circumstances, he falls into conversation with Lord Killeen, who is in rather higher spirits than usual to-night in consequence of the re-lighting of the torch of hope in his breast about his Galway property.

'Your friends the Annesleys have given us the slip to-night,' his lordship says, gaily. 'Annesley has got my beloved country on the brain, and has rushed over to look at a property I want to sell in Galway.'

'Annesley will land himself on a barren shore some day if he doesn't look out,' Mackiver replies. 'This West-end practice and the furnishing the house has swallowed up all his capital nearly ; he ought to work hard and recoup, and not go across "desperate seas" to search for fortune that he'll never find in Ireland.'

'Oh ! I don't know,' Lord Killeen says, with brilliant hopefulness. 'Miss Lepell's money will put him all right, and I'll let him have this place in Galway for a song.'

'What's the name of this place?' Mackiver asks ; and just

then the Honourable Miss Thynne has herself whirled by a skilful partner into their vicinity. As she holds her hand out to Ronald Mackiver and says—

‘These “Sweetheart” waltzes are too good to be missed ; why are not you dancing ?’ Lord Killeen says—

‘My cousin was christened after the place. Tell him what the Galway property and you are called, and he’ll get the right pronunciation.’

‘It was a whim of my mother’s I should have the name at least,’ the girl says, smiling, ‘so I’m called “Darragh”!’

CHAPTER II.

A GALWAY DEMESNE.

THE morning breaks blue, beaming, and bright, as the steamer in which they have crossed discharges her passengers at Kingstown. The sea has been smooth, and the sunshine on the distant hills seems to hold out a golden promise from the land to which the Annesleys are coming for the first time. What wonder that in view of this goodly harbour, and these green and gold-tipped lands all prudent dread of ‘what the Lepells will think of Robert’s plan’ should fade from Dolly’s mind ?

‘In half-an-hour we shall be testing the capabilities of the “Shelbourne,” the hotel that Killeen declares to be “the best in the world,”’ Mr. Annesley says, as he seats himself by his sister in the railway carriage. ‘I say, Dolly, these Irish appreciate their own land. “Darragh’s the loveliest spot in creation,” Killeen says.’

‘These Irish are rather ready to leave the loveliest spots

in creation. Do you think there can be any reason for it, Robert?' Dolly asks.

'Oh! of course. I know what you mean—smouldering sedition, anarchy, lawlessness, disorder, and all the rest of it are reigning, or are about to reign, in the land; and that's why Killeen is willing to part with Darragh. My dear Dolly, dismiss all that arrant nonsense from your mind, and look plain facts in the face: the crops were good last year, and promise to be even better this; the country is quiet and prosperous, and not at all disaffected. They're purely private considerations that make Killeen want to sell Darragh. The people are just exactly what the landlords make them. Treat them well and liberally, let them *live* like men and women, and not like pigs, out of the land they labour on, and their worst acts of rebellion will be to sing, "Let Erin remember the days of old," and "Wearin' of the Green."'

'I'm prepared to be delighted with Darragh and to be devoted to the people; but several of our friends have failed to find perfect felicity on their Irish estates, and I don't think that they were much less deserving than we are,' the girl laughs as the train runs into the station—a fortuitous circumstance, which enables her brother to evade answering her in a convenient and creditable manner.

It is a busy day in Dublin, and the "Shelbourne" is wide awake by the time they reach it—wide awake, but in *des-habille* still, as is evidenced by the crumminess of the tablecloths and the dustiness of the furniture of the spacious saloon into which they are ushered for breakfast. But there is such warmth and radiance in the atmosphere, and such a beautiful southern air of do-nothing and care-for-nothing about the waiters, that Dolly feels that words of reprobation

as to the staleness of the soles and the greasiness of the chops will be worse than idle and vain.

Accordingly she does not utter them, but solaces herself with shrimps that have just come up from Queenstown or Cork—shrimps of such weight and magnitude that no truly generous prawn could feel hurt at their being mistaken for his branch of the family; and as she shells them with the skill of an appreciative adept Mr. Annesley ponders over the railway time-table, and relieves that occupation by studying the flavour of broiled salmon from the Liffey.

The meal is a mixture of breakfast and luncheon, for they purpose leaving the Broadstone 'Terminus about mid-day in order that they may reach Galway in time to see something of the old Spanish-looking city before dark. While they are lingering over it at a table in the window, a young man comes hurriedly into the room, calling as he comes for his bill and a brandy-and-soda in a voice they know.

In a moment they recognise him as Arthur Thynne, a cousin of Lord Killeen's, and he remembers them as the 'jolly people Killeen picked up last year at Matlock.'

They are all together, fraternizing in a way that is characteristic of the soil on which they stand, in a moment, he hearing what is startling news to him about Darragh, and they learning from him that the Liberal member for Galway died last night, and that he has been advised by a hundred disinterested friends who want the fun of a fight to stand for that part of the county.

'Will it go against you if Lord Killeen sells Darragh? They won't think so well of you perhaps if he parts with his property to an English stranger, will they?' Dolly asks.

'Oh! I shouldn't stand on Killeen's interest; I shall get in on Home Rule, if I get in at all. Killeen's is a *safe* line

of policy, entirely opposed to my patriotic one. Though he wears an Irish title, and owns a good deal more Irish land than he deserves, there's very little of the Celt about him; he's a cautious, suspicious fellow, fancying always that the potatoes are going to explode under his feet and the sham-rocks cast some pernicious spell around him.'

'There isn't much stuff in Killeen,' Mr. Annesley says, in a satisfied tone, feeling how differently he will be spoken of when he owns Darragh.

'I thought Lord Killeen lived a good deal on his Irish estates, and was a liberal employer, Robert,' Dolly remarks, in some amazement, for it is beginning to dawn upon her that Lord Killeen, who is one of the kindest, heartiest, and cheeriest of little men, has either failed in his duty to Darragh, or found the denizens in and around Darragh wanting in their duty to him.

'He has been a little too exacting, I fancy?' Mr. Annesley says interrogatively to Mr. Thynne, and on this encouragement, slight as it is, that enthusiastic young gentleman launches out into what almost sounds like bitter invective against his noble kinsman. But as his face wears a balmy smile the while his fierce utterances are being made, Dolly dismisses anxiety and apprehension, and starts presently for Galway with a light heart and a frankly expressed hope that 'Mr. Thynne may succeed in his worthy ambition of liberally representing his fellow-countrymen.'

'Are you on your way to London?' Robert asks, as he shakes hands at parting. And Mr. Thynne's broad, good-humoured face relaxes into a more than ordinary mellow smile as he replies—

'Yes. I'm going to try if Killeen has family feeling enough in him to give me the tin to keep me going while I'm carrying on the campaign. You see, I depend entirely

on the pen, and though I wouldn't exchange its power for the heaviest purse in the world——'

'Finish that sentence in your next leader,' Robert laughs out, as he hurries his sister into the carriage; and in an instant the train is off, and Arthur Thynne stands looking after it regretfully.

'That's a glorious girl,' the young fellow thinks, as he retraces his steps to the 'Shelbourne.' 'Has money, too, I think Killeen told me; she has better brains, too, to help a fellow with than Darragh can boast—but Darragh's a queen of a girl, and I wish with all my heart for her sake that I had come to the title instead of that ass Harry. By Jove! if she came over and canvassed for me, I'd come in with an overwhelming majority, sure enough! As it is, I suppose I won't be let look at her.'

'I can't help liking that Mr. Thynne for wishing to get into Parliament and try to benefit his country-people; but isn't he rather unjust to Lord Killeen, and isn't he rather mean in being ready to take Killeen's money?' Dolly asks, as they rush along through Blanchardstown—and then, as Robert answers her ramblingly, she ceases to speculate on the subject, and becomes absorbed in the novel aspect of the land over which they are speeding.

Meantime, Robert Annesley, who has all his life been wont to act on impulse, and repent him of his acts at leisure, is occupied in reading up all the information he can glean from an agent's letter and sundry guide-books about Darragh and its neighbourhood.

All that he learns from the guide-books is intensely satisfactory. 'Darragh lies between Oranmore and Galway City, and from its well-wooded grounds beautiful views of the islands of Arran and Galway Bay are to be had. These grounds are wildly and romantically beautiful in some parts,

and in others highly cultivated, richly planted, and intersected with walks that are bordered by magnificent shrubs and grand old trees. The house is a handsome grey stone structure, with a square tower at one end and a turret at the other, and of sufficient size and importance to justify its owners in calling it a castle if they pleased. But hitherto its owners have rightly been contented to call it simply Darragh. It is said that lead has been found in large quantities on the demense, but mining operations have never been carried out, and, therefore, we can hardly give credence to this rumour.'

'Dolly, I believe I'm in for a big fortune in buying this property,' Robert says, calling his sister's attention to this passage, and she, being quite as desirous for his welfare as he is himself, reads it with avidity and replies with sympathy:

'It seems to be all that you could wish, Robert; Marian can't help liking such a place. I see maidenhair ferns are found down among the fissures of the rocks on the coast side of the grounds. How lovely!'

'Almost as good as the lead, eh, Dolly?' he says, with a good-tempered, superior, patronising air. He almost feels as if he were the lord of Darragh already, and though he will soon have to crave a great favour from his sister, he cannot help deporting himself as such to her already.

'*What* a climate it must be! Maidenhair ferns growing wild, roses and myrtles blooming and living in the open air all the year round, just as they do in Cornwall and the Scilly Isles, and a soft humidity in the atmosphere from the influence of the Gulf Stream, which is instrumental in keeping fresh and fair the notoriously beautiful bloom of Irish girls. Robert, if you strike lead, and Marian finds the air agree with her complexion, you'll be a happy man.'

CHAPTER III.

WHAT DARRAGH MEANS.

AMONG these themes Dolly's tongue ran on in sheer gladness of heart. She has quite got over her chagrin at having been kept away from Lady Killeen's ball and missing Ronald Mackiver, and all her current interest is given to Darragh and her brother. He cannot help wishing as she goes on talking of the fragile ferns, and the blooming flowers, and the gigantic lobsters with which this land is blessed, that Miss Lepell 'would speak, and think, and feel, and look a little more like Dolly.' Not but what he is very fond of his grandly-proportioned love, and more than very proud of her; but as he thinks about her this evening in the streets of Galway, where everything is entirely unlike all the towns of his experience, he cannot help feeling that Marian is meant for the well-established walks of life, and that she will fail to find any poetry in the Claddagh.

Late into the night Robert Annesley and his sister saunter about through the streets of the old town, where the wide gateways, broad stairs, and a variety of fantastic architectural ornamentation carries them in imagination to the Granada and Cadiz of which they have read. Oblivious of the human want and penury which is crouching just out of sight around them, they see nothing but beauty in the softening moonlight, and feel no warning in the breath of liberty which blows in freely from the bay.

'You go with me heart and soul in wishing to make a home here, don't you, Dolly?' Mr. Annesley says, as they stand in one of the windows of the dining hall at Darragh the next day, and look out through much dust and a few rose branches, upon a superb, uncultured scene.

‘Heart and soul, Robert. Do take some of my money to help put the place in order.’

‘My dear girl, that’s the very thing I find I must say to you,’ he says eagerly; ‘your money must come into the business—that is, if you will trust me, Dolly. Killeen didn’t say that he wanted the purchase-money down, but I find from the agent’s letter that if I want Darragh I must be prepared to pay ten thousand pounds at once.’

‘Why, that’s just my fortune; how lucky! Take what you want, Robert, and I’ll come and help you to look for the lead mine and to keep the people happy and contented, and make them good specimens of the finest peasantry in the world.’

‘Yes,’ he says, meditatively, ‘we’ll show what a good, straightforward, manly, liberal line of conduct can do. I wish with all my heart that young Thynne wasn’t coming here to upset us all with his nonsensical notions.’

‘You have always said that the Home Rulers had a lot of right on their side, Robert?’

‘Yes, but I don’t want the right on their side to be ranged against me now I’m a landowner—or nearly one; he has his hand in half-a-dozen of the best London journals too, and can say what he wants through the press much too powerfully for him to be an agreeable opponent.’

‘Why should you dread him? He’ll never oppose you, or be anything but a firm ally to such a liberal employer and good landlord as you will be,’ she says, with an air of half-questioning astonishment that makes him retort impatiently—

‘You know nothing about it, dear; if people get stirred up against law and order they don’t care whether the law is lenient to them and the order agreeable or not; they’ll rebel against it, and try to make it hot for those who enforce it;

that's what Killeen found here, and I believe that's the reason he's letting me have this place so cheap.'

'*Don't* come here if you're not coming with your whole heart,' Dolly cries in a prophetic spirit, and then she wishes she had bitten her tongue before she had spoken thus, when her brother replies :

'Are you afraid that I shall sink your money and never be able to repay you? My dear child, *you're* all safe ; even if Darragh turns out to be a worse investment than I think it now, you shall not be a loser by it'

'Don't fear for me,' she says, smiling encouragingly—trying to win him from the sombre mood into which he has fallen for a few moments. 'Don't fear for me! Darragh! I feel that I shall love the place ; the name delights me already. Does "Darragh" mean anything, Robert?'

'It's a corruption of "Deargh," which means "red" in Irish-Gaelic, and "Agh" is a "field," I believe ; I suppose one of their gory battles was fought here ages ago, and it's called "red field" in consequence.'

'Darragh! Darragh! I think the name will haunt me all my life ; it seems to make the place much nearer and dearer, and more like a living personal friend to me than if it were called the Castle or the Hall,' she says softly, and then she banishes poesy and comes back to plain, practical prose.

'There's a lot to be done in the house before you can dare to bring Marian here ; the whole place wants polishing up ; all the furniture that isn't torn and tattered is tawdry.'

'I'll lay furnishing-pipes on from Dublin ; that will soon be set straight. You write to Marian and ask her what colours she will have in the respective rooms ; that's all she need bother herself about ; you and I can do the rest while we're here.'

'And you won't be extravagant?'

‘No, no, I won’t—there ! I promise you I won’t,’ he says testily, and she crimsones with annoyance at the thought that he may fancy that she is asking him to be cautious because the money is hers that he is going to use.

‘I’ll never ask him to be prudent again,’ she resolves, vexedly ; ‘his worst imprudences have so much good feeling in them that they never lead to any harm. Dear old boy, I wouldn’t have him think me grudging and cautious about the money for the world.’

She is so buoyant, so blithely delighted with Darragh and the prospect of life there for a time, that her brother, whose nature it is to look always on the sunny side, sees a vista of unlimited prosperity and happiness stretching out before him. They penetrate into every nook and corner of the rambling old house, which has been the home of some of the mighty Lynches in days of yore. The ‘trefoil and the lynx’ are carved over many of the mantel-pieces, and in one painted-glass window they find not only the coat-of-arms but the motto, ‘Guarded by its own virtue,’ which the great Galway race had taken for its own. On some of the tattered tapestry in the state bedroom the trefoil still blooms in faded silks, and the lynx still watches as keenly as when, generations ago, the dames and damsels of the house worked it with their fair and skilful fingers. There is a buffet full of grand old silver, and some carved black bog oak that seems to have been touched by fairy fingers, and taught to blossom into flower and leaf. And standing in solitary state, chained to the massive table on which it stands, there is a giant punch-bowl of Irish gold, over which orgies, the remembrance of which makes modern blood run cold, have been held.

There are only three or four servants in the house, and these are not Killeen adherents at all, but descendants

of the 'ould ancient stocks that served the Lynches' before the place passed into Killeen's hands. These have no love for their absent lord—not that he has ever done them any harm, they admit, but because 'he and his uncle before him were strangers, and held most un-national and unorthodox ideas about work, paid no regard to the claims of the blessed saints, in fact, but exacted labour in return for wages when everybody knows that holy days should be kept holy in idleness with whisky and blackened duddeens, and maybe with a free fight towards evening.'

They are genial-looking old servants who enunciate these views, men and women with smiling faces, well-fed forms, and merry grey eyes. There is no appearance of their not having been well kept and cared for under the Killeen *régime*, but the only one of this family for whom they have a good word is the daughter of the 'ould lord,' the Honourable Miss Thynne.

For her they have nothing but good words, and good wishes. The beautiful darling who has grown up free in their midst, with her voice like a bell, and her face with all the sweetness of the saints who have smiled upon her, and the glory of the great bygone race from whom she is descended on her mother's side, she is the 'real lady of the land' in their estimation. And as they tell of her long solitary rides into desolate and distant places, to carry relief to the sick and the starving, to whisper comfort to the sorrowful, and to incite the young and strong to work and raise themselves, Dolly honestly feels more strongly than before that this magic word 'Darragh' will haunt her all her life.

With their usual adaptability and their happy art of seeming, these people do not appear at all averse to the threatened

English rule which is to be inaugurated here. They find something congenial in Mr. Annesley's ardent, eager way of wanting to settle things off-hand without tedious delay ; and it does not occur to them that the gentleman who makes a joke of the reigning untidiness and dirt will be intolerant to the suspicion of either when he comes here as master. 'It's the aisy times we'll have of it when himself and the young lady come,' they tell one another as they sit down to the capital fare (spoilt by the most villainous cooking) which is provided for them with Lord Killeen's money. There are plenty of plates and dishes, abundance of fair table-linen, and knives and forks *ad libitum* for the use of the kitchen. But the excellent and unpretentious retainers prefer the simplicity of bare boards, food hooked up from the croches, and their fingers to the above-mentioned superfluities of civilisation. Well for them, in their disorderly happiness and comfort and unclean content and satisfaction, that they have no pre-vision of the Marian who is coming, supported by 'mamma and the girls.' But is it well for Dolly that her pre-sight fails her now?

CHAPTER IV.

A FAIR FOE TO PEACE.

AMONG the qualities which Captain Mackiver most highly prizes in officers and gentlemen is the great, glorious, and rare one of fidelity!

Fidelity, not only to a pledge or vow, or a promise written or spoken, but fidelity to the silent love and the unspoken faith. The knowledge of his own love for Dolly Annesley, and the intuitive conviction that Dolly Annesley returns

that love with all the warmth of her high-strung heart, has been quite sufficient to keep the good-looking, agreeable, popular young soldier out of all temptation offered by feminine assailants up to the present time. They are not engaged! If Dolly married a duke to-morrow the world would have no right to call her a jilt, or hint that he had been hardly treated. Nor, on the other hand, would it be justified in gloating over Dolly's pitiful case if he suddenly surrendered to some enamoured queen. They are both free as air! But an invisible chain binds him to Dolly, and he would as soon think of running away in action as of seeking any other woman than this beautiful old friend of his for his wife.

But this night, while Dolly is crossing the Channel on her way to the place the name of which she prophetically feels will haunt her all her life, Ronald Mackiver sees for the first time a girl who would rival and perhaps displace Dolly from his heart, if—his heart had not already spoken to and been answered by Dolly. Darragh Thynne comes before him with her merry, smiling mouth, her melancholy violet eyes—with all that romantic mixture of mirth and sadness which is naturally produced by the efforts of a lively temperament to shake off the memory of some real or fancied wrong. Brought up partly in France, but chiefly in the wildly picturesque solitude of her mother's dearly loved home, the girl had embroidered on her deep southern fervent nature a charming tracery of French *esprit* and grace. There is not a touch of the accent of her native land in her tones; 'the purest, prettiest pronunciation that has ever soothed a man's ears,' Captain Mackiver thinks she has. She does not even indulge in the peculiar construction of sentences which sometimes leads Lady Killeen's hearers to forget that her ladyship was not to the Milesian manner born, and that she

hails from Manchester. But though no touch of the accent is on her tongue, Darragh is never taken for an English girl. France and Ireland have each a part in her bearing, her habits, her ways of thought, and manner of making thought manifest. But Ireland reigns alone in her heart, and for that heart's sake *one* man at least is a patriot already, and is ready to become a martyr.

Dolly's lover and Darragh dance together more than is wise without let or hindrance from anyone. Lady Killeen puts up her glass and follows their perfect evolutions occasionally, and smiles to herself as she notes how Darragh's mobile lips are in almost ceaseless motion, and with what an air of concentrated intensity Mackiver is listening to her. Lady Killeen has no dislike to Darragh, only Darragh reminds her of a place and an experience which she detests, and moreover, Darragh's views 'are horrible,' and not at all what might be expected from 'a girl of such unmistakable caste' as the Honourable Miss Thynne.

'If that young man will fall in love with her, take her face for her fortune, and carry her off to India, Killeen and I should be much more at ease,' Lady Killeen thinks. Then she remembers that some one has said something to her at some time about Mackiver and 'that beautiful Miss Annesley.' As she remembers this her ladyship reflects with satisfaction that the possibly 'beautiful Miss Annesley' is rapidly nearing the shores of Erin by this time. 'Darragh conquers quickly,' Darragh's lady guardian tells herself, and then she utters a silent prayer that the other difficulty of the family—Arthur Thynne, a young cousin of her husband's—may not arrive inopportunately and upset things.

Meanwhile, Darragh and Captain Mackiver are ceasing from their harmonious revolvings to the strain which is now at the height of its popularity—

‘ Oh, love for a year, a week, a day !
But alas ! for the love that loves alway !’

and are seated in a nice warm, sheltered, highly-odorous corner of the conservatory talking of the Claddagh !

The Honourable Miss Thynne is as much of a rebel as it is possible for a woman to be in these days. Her private grievance about Darragh—her ‘ mother’s place ’ having been left away from her, whose heart-strings are twined round it—strengthens her sentiments of aversion to the ‘ proud invader ’ generally. She dislikes, distrusts, and denounces English settlers and ‘ improvers ’ on her native soil. But far more heartily does she dislike, distrust, and denounce Irish inheritors who are not ready to run all risks in the cause of ameliorating the condition of the inert and vicious among the lower orders of her country people. She is a rebel to the extent of longing to see the dominion of England’s Queen and constitution thrown off ! She declares that she has wrestled with and subdued the pardonable feminine desire to look well in the eyes of, and to win a favourable opinion from, England’s Royal Princes ! But rebel as she is, Darragh is a gentlewoman, and so she says nothing that may place the man who wears the Queen’s uniform in a cleft stick. Accordingly, she abstains from all the subjects with which her mind is teeming and her graceful head half-turned, and tells him about her own life in Galway.

‘ I lived at Darragh alone with papa for four years, and I’ve danced jigs at a dozen weddings, and cried and groaned at a dozen wakes, on the demesne during that time. Arthur and I love every stick and stone on the place for miles round the house. When I meet a Connaught lobster in a salad here in town I seem to recognise him as an old friend even. I shan’t wish your friends, the Annesleys, a happy time in my own home.’

‘Who’s Arthur?—a brother?’ Captain Mackiver questions.

‘A brother? No; at least, not *my* brother; if he had been, or if I had been a boy, he or I would have been Lord Killeen, and I shouldn’t be called upon to think uncharitably of the Annesleys for taking my precious home from me; not but what Killeen took it from me from the moment papa died; but it seems to be going from my grasp utterly, now that I hear they have gone to look at it. Don’t you wish I had been a boy?’

No! honestly speaking, while he looks at her, he cannot wish that so fair and lovely a thing had been cast in a masculine mould.

‘I can’t wish you to be anything but yourself: if “Arthur” wasn’t a brother, did he happen to be anything very near and dear in the shape of a horse or a dog?’

‘Indeed, no! he was my cousin! only that! A cousin on my father’s side, but a real Irishman! a real Thynne, not a cautious balancer like Killeen.’

She speaks with ringing force, but she remembers as she speaks that she is in honour tongue-tied to this man, who cannot think and feel as she does, who ought not to pray for a united Ireland under Irish rule. So she turns again to the Claddagh.

‘You should be there on the eve of St. John,’ she says; ‘they elect their Mayor the “King of Claddagh” that night, and light fires all over the town, and the girls and boys dance round with torches and dock-stems in their hands; it’s all joy and gladness that night; you could hardly believe that under that bright veil there is starvation and misery, gaunt want, sin brought about by suffering and misrule, and a bitter sense of injury.’

The earnest, sad side of her nature comes up and reveals

itself to him as she says this. Instantly his interest is awakened for down-trodden Ireland, and the sons and daughters of the land who smile and show no sign of pain on the eve of St. John.

‘You want English organization, English gold, and English employers over there, Miss Thynne; Annesley will be the right man in the right place if he lets his sister Dolly direct him, but if he’s guided by his future wife, I can’t be very sanguine about his success.’

‘We want neither English employers, gold, nor organization,’ she replies; ‘we want to be let alone to develop our own industries, and reap what we have sown on our own land.’

‘Are you not reaping what you have sown already?’ he asks, smilingly, for he does not know yet how deeply Darragh’s dignity is involved in this question of the pacific subjugation or rebellious assertion of her country’s claims.

‘Yes,’ she says; ‘we have sown in servitude, and we are reaping in slavery.’

‘I didn’t quite mean that,’ he says; and then the ‘Sweet-hearts’ strain claims their willing obedience to its moving dulcet melody again.

Late in the evening, when the casual acquaintance element is eliminated, and the friends of this, one of the most genial households in London, are drawing nearer together, they get round the piano and listen to Lady Killeen, who sings ‘The Threë Ravens,’ ‘The Oak and the Ash, and the Merrie Ivy Tree,’ and ‘Lady Greensleeves’ in a contralto that has been described as ‘quite equal to Antoinette Sterling’s’ by admiring private critics. When her ladyship has had her full meed of flattery and praise, she remembers that ‘Darragh sings a little,’ and in spite of Miss Thynne’s declaration that

she hasn't any singing blood left in her, she is put upon the music stool and told to try.

'It must be something that I can't go wrong in asleep or awake,' she says, beginning to play the prelude to an entrancing old Irish air; 'I'm slumbering already, and not a bit accountable for what I may sing in dreamland.'

Then her glorious violet eyes droop under their tired eyelids, and in a softened, hushed voice that seems to come to them from a higher spirit in another world, she sings—

'She is far from the land where her young hero sleeps,
And lovers around her are sighing.'

When her song comes to a close there is silence for a few moments, silence which Lady Killeen breaks by saying :—

'If I get up some *tableaux*, will you play Sarah Curran for me, Darragh? I've no doubt Captain Mackiver won't mind posing as one of the lovers who are sighing around you, and Arthur could be the young hero sleeping in the far-off land.'

In answer to this, which is the nearest approach to a playful sally which her ladyship has ever been known to make, Darragh says :

'If Arthur ever poses as Robert Emmett he won't do it for your *amusement*, Lady Killeen. But you tell me that the days of sedition and down-trodden misery are over in Ireland,' she adds, turning to her cousin; 'therefore why should you put it in a prettily suggestive form before æsthetic, well-conditioned London people, who might be stirred by the sight into suffering real pain for those on the other side of the Channel if they knew what it looked like?'

'According to what you have been telling me, Ireland is the real Isle of the Blessed,' Captain Mackiver says; then, as Darragh's steady, inquiring glance fills the silence like a

speech, he feels that he has said something frivolous, and that Darragh and frivolity are wide apart.

‘If I have made you think that there is blessed peace and love in Ireland now I have misled you, Captain Mackiver,’ she says presently. And then she adds, with all her native force and acquired grace, ‘And I am sorry for it; too many people are “misled” about Ireland just now for me to league with the misleaders.’

‘But Arthur’s putting everybody right in the magazines, isn’t he?’ Lady Killeen asks languidly; ‘somebody told me the other day that my lord’s cousin was quite “the pea of the malcontents” or obstructionists. Was it you, Darragh?’

‘No. I’m sure I never said that,’ Darragh says, with what would look like supreme indifference to Ronald if he had not happened to catch the curious glint in her eyes when Arthur’s name was mentioned.

‘Arthur would like to take Darragh and chop it up into little bits, and hand it over to the gentlemen who are indigenous to the soil, to those who like to do nothing and live luxuriously on the proceeds of what they do,’ Lord Killeen says with the gay, pleasant air that often seems to do away with distress until distress seems sternly to be done away with.

‘For shame, Killeen!’ Darragh says, cuttingly.

‘Why “for shame,” you dear little banished Queen of Connaught?’

‘Don’t call me that,’ she cries, swinging round on the music stool as she speaks, ‘don’t *you* be the one to remind me that I’m banished from Galway, and that Darragh’s lost to me, Killeen.’

‘Is that a bit of an Irish melody?’ Lady Killeen asks superciliously. ‘I am never sure whether I’m listening to a proper composition or to an impromptu. Miss Thynne likes

to put the "leaf and the harp" forward on all possible occasions! I am merely a tyro in the art of appreciating either! you see, I wasn't born a descendant of Brian Boru's, as all you Irish say you are, and I see no merit in "wearing the green" unless the green happens to be a fashionable colour and suits my complexion.'

'Let us all sing "God Save Our Gracious Queen" and go to bed,' Darragh says, rising up. 'I'll sing that with all my heart, for I wish her Majesty well—our dear Lady of Great Britain——'

'And Ireland?' Killeen shouts out.

'No, *not* of Ireland! Captain Mackiver, turn your back on me as you drink to her as our Irish Queen; she's everything that the most exciting imagination could require her to be, and your laws are sound—and your Irish policy is liberal—but the Queen of England doesn't reign in our hearts, sir! We would not die for her!'

'Nor would you for anyone else, you goose,' Lady Killeen says, rising up and showing Mackiver plainly that it is time for him to depart; 'die for her, indeed! as if anyone was called upon to die for anything in these days!'

'I think I could do it,' Darragh says, and her cousin's wife pats her on the shoulder, and tells her that she 'is not cast in the tragical mould.'

Captain Mackiver finds Dolly's note awaiting him at the hotel, where he is obliged to sleep this night, as he has missed the last train to Aldershot. Her few words keep on mixing themselves up curiously in his dreams with much that Darragh has been saying to him to-night, and at times he finds himself joining in wild waltzes to Irish melodies through the streets of the Claddagh on the eve of St. John. He wakes at length, with a startled shock, just as he is about to wed both Dolly and Darragh with one of the Claddagh fish-

wives' massive golden rings, and as he leaps out of bed he thanks Heaven heartily that this last complication is nothing but a dream.

Unfortunately for some resolves he makes, he has three days' leave, and, as chance will have it, he is thrown into the society of the Honourable Miss Thynne again in the course of the day. Together with one or two of his brother officers he is leaning over the rails in Rotten-row, when Lord Killeen and Darragh pass slowly by on horseback, and Captain Mackiver cannot help being drawn into warmer admiration for the sweet face and splendid form (seen to consummate advantage now) of the beautiful Irish girl.

'I've just had a telegram from a cousin of mine in Ireland, the young fellow we were speaking of last night, telling me that he's going to stand in the Liberal interest for some place in Galway. I hope with all my heart that your friend Annesley will take Darragh off my hands before Arthur gets in and distinguishes himself for supreme mischievous folly in the House,' Lord Killeen says, and Darragh puts in :

'Don't you believe that Arthur will give the enemies of his cause the pleasure of hearing him make it ridiculous, Captain Mackiver. He has the best brains of the family—even Killeen will admit that.'

'He's clever enough, but so grossly mistaken in his views. If he and his colleagues make their party-cry of "Ireland for the Irish" heard with effect, the people they're striving to benefit will curse them when the crisis comes.'

'When the crisis comes the people will rise like one man and bless their deliverers,' Darragh says, with such an air of enthusiastic conviction that Captain Mackiver feels his fixed impression, as to the Irish difficulty being merely a tempest in a tea-cup, slightly shaken.

'There's one comfort, if they begin to row and be trouble-

some the Government will soon pour a few troops into the country ; a little military law will soon restore order then,' Lord Killeen goes on ; and Darragh sends a glance so full of grand appeal and reproach straight into Captain Mackiver's eyes, that he fondly hopes his lines may be cast in India, South Africa, or any other quarter of the globe than Ireland when the crisis comes.

'I suppose she's engaged to this aspiring young politician,' the English soldier thinks, as he watches the Irish girl out of sight. 'A woman always takes her political colouring from the man she is in love with. Darragh's too nice and sensible a girl to mean what she says about their "rising like one man and blessing their deliverers ;" they never do anything like "one man," they've no concentration ; there's always a "faithless son" or two engaged in the business who betrays the best-laid plot against the standing order of things.'

'They say that Miss Thynne might make the best match of the season—that young fellow who popped into that big property, and unexpectedly became Marquis of Portbank the other day, has proposed to her,' one of the aforesaid brother-officers remarks presently.

CHAPTER V.

ARTHUR THYNNE RECEIVES ENCOURAGEMENT.

THE Lepells' house and grounds down on the Dallands Park estate, between Weybridge and Walton-on-Thames, are notorious—the one for its magnificent and sumptuous furniture and appointments, the other for their superb cultivation and enormous display of glass.

Mr. Lepell is a wealthy stock-broker, with a worthy ambition and a steadfast determination to become wealthier every year. Unflaggingly zealous in pursuit of every business change or chance which may be of pecuniary benefit to himself, he is nevertheless strongly opposed to anything, however remunerative, that is of a shady or even doubtful nature. A strictly honourable man in fact, but at the same time one who looks sharply after the main chance, and has no sympathy with any one who has not succeeded as well as himself in the chief business of life—namely, money-making !

His highest ambition, next to increasing his income and marrying his daughters to safe men—‘good “warm” men,’ he calls them, ‘fellows who say to themselves early in life that they’ll have a real out-and-out good position, and attain to the right of living in real unmistakable style’—his highest ambition next to these noble desires is to have the largest hothouses and the finest grapes in the county of Surrey. If his grapes are not of fleshier proportions and finer flavour than any that he meets with elsewhere, he is a miserable man, and his head-gardener is much to be pitied. But if he turns away from Brooks’s window in Regent Street with the softening conviction in his mind that ‘there is nothing here to beat a few bunches he can show in his little place at Walton,’ he is a happy man, and a child might lead him with a silken thread.

He has other houses besides these vineries which are so dear to him in every way. His collection of cacti is almost equal to the one at Kew, and one glance at his foliage plants is as good as a journey to the tropics. But ‘these are fads of his wife’s and daughters,’ he will tell you in his fat prosperous tones. The ‘only things that *he* thinks a trifle creditable perhaps are his grapes !’

But if his ambitions are limited, his wife's are boundless. Money and rank are the gods she worships, and if she can only see one of her nice-looking, well-dressed girls marry a combination of the two, the most earnest prayers she ever uttered in her life will be satisfactorily answered. Up to the present time they have not married at all, but their mother feels that Providence has been keeping a flatteringly special watch over them, in that they have not been tempted by offers of love in a cottage, or even of a safe and modest competency.

Marian's engagement to Robert Annesley, the surgeon, has not been brought about without some trouble. His living at Walton in a fine house and in capital style had been greatly in his favour in Mrs. Lepell's eyes, for the mother and her daughters are affectionate women, and love the prospect of being near together ; but his being spoken of as a country doctor had galled. The move to Cavendish Square, therefore, had certain elements of good in it in Mrs. Lepell's estimation, though her husband shook his head at the riskiness of the step, and Marian grumbled at the prospect of being cut off from daily intercourse with her sisters.

Still, the position of a fashionable rising young doctor's wife in Cavendish Square is accepted by the family as being a good one, 'even for Marian;' and lacking a gilded duke or belted earl as a suitor of Miss Lepell, Robert Annesley is very well received.

But when the tidings burst upon them like a bomb-shell from Ireland that Annesley has actually gone over to what they regard as the barren and barbaric west coast of Ireland, to buy an estate and eventually settle there, lamentations of a loud and reprobatory order arise. The young lady who is champion of the best amateur lawn-tennis club

in the county, and who has been looking forward to retaining prominent and honourable position on the ground where she has gained her laurels, 'while her figure lasts,' is reduced to tears of mortification and disappointment as she reads her lover's letter, though, to do him justice, he has painted all things in rose-coloured hues.

'It's all Dolly's doing. I feel sure that Robert would never have done such a mad, idiotic, unkind thing if Dolly had not urged him on,' she cries, when she has communicated the contents of the letter to her family. 'I *hate* the Irish! They all go about barefooted, and eat raw pork and potatoes, and shoot at you from behind hedges. Mamma, I will not go there.'

'We must reason him out of the purchase and away from the place,' Mrs. Lepell says reassuringly. She remembers that she has five daughters younger than Marian, and that engagements are not so easily made as broken.

'I shall take very good care to have your money tied up in such a way that none of it shall be thrown into the bogs of Darragh,' Mr. Lepell says, with becoming emphasis and pomp. 'Why on earth Annesley should take a step which he must know very well is directly opposed to my view of things I cannot understand; if he had any cash lying idle I could have invested it for him in a way that would have brought him wealth and reputation and the satisfaction of an honest conscience.'

'He will be a county man, won't he?' Mrs. Lepell asks a little anxiously. 'After all, if it is "dirt cheap," as he says, it may not be a bad investment. "Mrs. Annesley, Darragh, Galway, and Cavendish Square," will look very well on the cards.'

'It's all Dolly's doings I feel sure,' says Marian. 'Under that straightforward, generous manner of hers there's a lot

I don't like. I know she thinks that when I marry her brother I ought to give up thinking so much about tennis and things of that sort. She's always digging it into me that Robert, and Robert only, is to be thought of; just as if I didn't know how to behave to the man I'm going to marry.'

'It's very wrong of any one to come between engaged people,' Mrs. Lepell says earnestly. 'If I thought that Dolly was interfering in any way, I would soon give her to know that she must cease to meddle.'

'I shall take very good care that no one meddles with Annesley's money matters but myself if he wants to marry *my* daughter,' Mr. Lepell rejoins. 'If he can get this place and let it to a decent tenant, and the present people stay in and keep things quiet in Ireland, I'll say nothing; but if he takes up residential and regenerating notions, not a penny of Marian's money shall be in his power. I'll tie it up so tightly that no one but herself can touch it.'

'In any case that will be the wisest thing to do, papa,' Marian says, a little eagerly. 'Just imagine spending money on a place so far away where no one can see one.'

'It would look well to some of our friends if you could ask them in the autumn to your country place, even though it *is* in Ireland,' Mrs. Lepell says, with the same sort of magnanimous toleration which she might extend to a suggested temporary sojourn in Timbuctoo or among the Esquimaux.

'Oh, mamma. *No!* What attraction could such a place as Robert describes have for any reasonable person? "Maidenhair ferns, myrtle, and roses in wild luxuriance." (I hate wild luxuriance.) "An intensely picturesque fishing colony, called the Claddagh; and a peasantry that will be—what we make them!" Such a rhapsody about nothing must have been dictated by Dolly,' Marian says crossly.

'I wish Dolly were married and out of the way pleasantly,'

Mrs. Lepell says ; ' her influence will always be against your real interests, for she fosters that nasty habit of independence in her brother which is so extremely reprehensible. If Dolly were out of the way Robert would be a lamb in your hands ! —a perfect lamb ; and your dear papa would be able to forward his interests in so many ways.'

' He has got in with a bad lot, I'm afraid,' Mr. Lepell says, shaking his head. ' I've never approved of the intimacy with that Killeen set ; a title without a rent-roll to keep it up is a miserable thing !—a most miserable thing, and I'm told that if Lord Killeen had children to bring up he would be a pauper. A pauper with a handle to his name is, to my mind, a contemptible creature. I'd far rather have to deal with men of my own stamp—men who have raised themselves to affluence by their own ability and perseverance. When I started in life I made up my mind to do certain things and have certain things, and I've done them and got them solely through my own exertions.'

He casts a triumphantly challenging glance round the family circle as he says this, and with the greatest good taste and circumspection they chorus :

' Yes, papa, everybody knows that about you, papa.'

' And you've always had a careful, prudent wife at home to supplement your efforts abroad, papa,' Mrs. Lepell cackles, with intense self-appreciation. ' Oh, dear ! I often think if these dear girls make half as good wives to the men they marry as their mother has been to you, what a blessing there will be on us as a family.'

' I don't seem to care to be a good prudent wife on the West Coast of Ireland,' Marian says, laughing rather dolefully. ' *Won't* Mrs. St. John be in a way when she hears I am to be dragged off there ; she'll hate Dolly more than ever, and she hates her vigorously enough already.'

‘Poor dear little woman ! I think the way the Mackivers behave to Mrs. St. John would be a caution to any sensible person not to let a daughter enter *their* family,’ Mrs. Lepell says, with a Burleigh-like nod of the head.

‘Mrs. St. John is a woman who is quite able to take care of her own interests ; the Mackivers won’t succeed in cowing her down in this neighbourhood, for she knows that we support her, my dear,’ Mr. Lepell says to his wife, in his loftiest tones. Mrs. St. John, who occupies one of the smallest and least pretentious, but withal one of the prettiest and most expensive bijou residences in the neighbourhood of Weybridge, has a garden-party and lawn-tennis match this afternoon. Mrs. St. John is a delightful little person, on the right side of middle age, with ‘a story,’ and a very presentable personal appearance. She ‘aims at taking a place among the literary aspirants—not the literary “successes”—of the day,’ she tells people. And as already she has become a standing dish in a monthly magazine and a power on one or two weekly periodicals, she may be credited with having achieved her aim. Her brain is always at work, her hands are always full, every minute of her time is ‘precious to herself,’ she assures her hearers modestly. But she loves to see her friends about her, and to hear the laudatory mention they make of her while they knock the tennis-balls about, or partake of her elegantly arranged little banquets, which are neither luncheons nor teas, but a bewildering agreeable admixture of both.

One of these little banquets is going on in Mrs. St. John’s dining-room, the whole end of which is window opening to the south-west, when Marian Lepell’s possible banishment to a penal settlement called Galway, a place not even in the United Kingdom, crops up and is discussed. Oddly enough the name of ‘Darragh’ is no sooner mentioned than some

one present 'knows something about it'—after the unpleasant habit some people have of perpetually proving to us that 'this world is very small after all.'

'Darragh! Do you think of going there to live? It belongs to a cousin of mine, Killeen,' a man says, who is seated next to Miss Lepell at the table.

'Mr. Annesley thinks of buying it, so I suppose I shall have to stay there sometimes. Can you tell me about the place?' Marian says, in a tone that seems to assume that it is only the culpably ignorant who are not cognizant of Mr. Annesley's existence and of the relation in which he stands to herself—Miss Lepell.

'Oh, *do* give us one of your wonderful word-paintings of it, Mr. Thynne,' the hostess cries, clasping her plump little hands together, and leaning across the table towards Mr. Arthur Thynne, with a great display of deep interest and cultivated enthusiasm. 'Anything about that oppressed land is so absorbingly interesting to me,' she continues; 'I long to go over there, and work among them, and *strive* to immortalize them with my poor pen.'

There is such an astounding mixture of arrogance and humility in this speech that Arthur Thynne is struck dumb for the first time in his life for a moment or two. Then his vocal powers return with native force.

'If Darragh depended upon me, Mrs. St. John, I'd take care to have it in such good case that I could show a very attractive picture of what the Irish can do with their own to English eyes; as it is, it's passed or passing into the hands of an English apothecary, and for my part I don't care how soon it's laid waste and become another incentive to action instead of gusty talk.'

Above all things Mrs. St. John is a diplomatic woman, and this mention of the man who is engaged to her 'dear

friend Marian Lepell' as an 'English apothecary,' especially as it is made by another dear friend, Mr. Arthur Thynne, is very terrible to her. To hear Mrs. St. John discourse, one would imagine that her 'dear friends' outnumbered the hairs on her head or the sands of the sea. Oddly enough, when she comes to individualize and particularize, you learn that each one of these dear friends has 'wronged her faith,' or 'betrayed her trust,' or 'misunderstood and maligned her.' To hear her describe herself you must be made of impenetrable stuff indeed if you do not perceive her to be one of the meekest and most long-suffering of women. This view of her case obtains with some people lastingly, while others are unreasonable enough to date the destruction of some friendships that have been dear to them to the day on which they introduced Mrs. St. John to the friends who are falling away. Be this as it may, she is a very popular little woman in a certain set, and men of the most rigidly moral stamp are heard to inveigh against the 'baseness and cowardice of St. John in deserting her in the way he does.'

Not that this admirable little woman is separated from her husband! Only 'Mr. St. John likes to enjoy himself, and my vocation is—work!' she says, with her pleadingly pathetic smile, to those publishers and editors who interview her. They do not presume to inquire into the history of a lady who is so verbally grateful for their small mercies, but they one and all aver that she 'has been abominably treated,' and that it 'behoves them to give her a lift if possible.'

Mr. Arthur Thynne, the man who is going in for a Galway borough on Home Rule principles, is the latest addition she has made to the list of able men who believe in her, and take her at her own valuation. She learns his articles by heart, and quotes them to him in an impromptu manner, in

the most opportune way. He is almost surprised at the beauty of the sentences he has constructed himself, when she delivers them in pointed style before people who are open to the influence of what they call 'a good delivery.' He thinks it is all spontaneous on her part, and has no notion that she takes a weekly lesson in elocution from a gifted lady, who advertises herself as ready to teach 'members of Parliament, clergymen, barristers, and public entertainers generally,' how to make themselves understood by their audiences.

'I am in the way of hearing the opinion of a great many leading men in the world of letters about you,' she says to Arthur Thynne. 'Some way or other they are all kind to poor little me, and I am proud to think that I am treated as a confidential friend by many whose approval is sought in the most sycophantish way by *some* lady novelists whom I could mention. I take what comes to me, but I never *seek* the friendship of great men! I never *sought* yours, did I? though I was anxious—oh! *how* anxious to gain it; and now I hear from those who are competent to speak on such matters, that you are quite the "coming man" of your party—that you will be the Garibaldi of Ireland, in fact.'

'No, no,' he laughs; 'that's a little over the border; I may serve my country with my pen and help to deliver her with my tongue, but I don't wear a sword in her defence. Who likened me to Garibaldi?'

'I must not tell you,' she says, hanging her head down, with an air of modest embarrassment that would be infinitely becoming in a girl. Then she feels that she has blundered in dragging Garibaldi into the conversation in such a way, and so seeks to turn it.

'Your last article in *Matter-of-Fact* was surpassingly, entrancingly clever. I devoured rather than read it.'

'More than half of it was written by my cousin Darragh,' he says gratefully.

'Was it?' she responds coolly. 'I'm sorry to hear that, for though of course it was the *worst* half, you may fall into the folly of relying on her and thinking you can't work without her.'

'I never want to do anything without her,' he replies.

'Oh, in love, are we?' she says, pressing her plump chin archly down upon her plump chest, and throwing her eyes up at him from that position in a way that strains them in their sockets. 'In love, are we? I've forgotten all about that sort of thing, though people used to call me a pretty little woman long ago.'

This is a difficult remark to answer with that mixture of circumspection and gallantry which Mr. Thynne deems desirable. On the other hand, he is not at all above feeling that if Mrs. St. John does, as she says she does, know a number of men of 'light and leading,' she may be useful to him and to that cause which he has so honestly at heart. On the other hand, whatever she might have been in former times, she is anything but a pretty little woman now! But the days of his life in her favour will be surely numbered if he implies this. Accordingly, caution marks the guarded way in his reply. (And let it be here observed that no one can be more cautious on an emergency than an impulsive son of Erin.)

'It is hard to believe that those years *are* things of the past,' he says, saving his conscience and soothing the lady's vanity at the same time. As uttered by him they sound in Mrs. St. John's ears as if the days of her prettiness were still present in his estimation. But the meaning he attaches to them in his own mind is something rather different.

However this may be, the lady is well pleased with him,

and remembering that this young man is on the press and may help her novels on at some future time, she flatters him to the top of his bent, declares that 'if there is an Irish Parliament again he will be the leader of the House at least,' and leaves him longing for a great crisis to come which may give him the opportunity he pants for of distinguishing himself.

CHAPTER VI.

NEITHER 'FREE NOR UNITED.'

LORD KILLEEN and the cadet of his house, Arthur Thynne, have been closeted together in the library for two or three hours, and the ladies of the family are still in ignorance of the nature of the prolonged debate.

Lady Killeen, indeed, is placidly indifferent. To her Arthur is a person who lacks all interest. In Ireland he has always mixed himself up with the people who had grievances, real or imaginary, against her husband, and whom therefore she cordially and naturally detests. And in England he writes flaming articles in journals that are not of the first form ; and she gets congratulated about them as one of the family, by obnoxious people who will persist in regarding the clever young political *littérateur* as a person of whom she ought to be proud.

Among these obnoxious people is Mrs. St. John, who resembles a snowball in the force and power she possesses of rolling along and gaining as she rolls. The prolific and popular authoress is not at all the sort of person who, on a superficial view of the case, would be deemed likely to become the familiar friend of Lady Killeen, who if she is anything marked, is proudly stupid, and stupidly afraid of

derogating from her own dignity. But Mrs. St. John has mastered her completely, and established herself on such a footing in the house that Lady Killeen's older friends stand no chance against her. But when she sings the praises of Arthur Thynne she oversteps the mark, and causes Lady Killeen to remember that 'these people are all very well in their way, but are sadly deficient in tact.'

'Mr. Thynne is a renegade from the politics of his family, and a less good-natured man than Lord Killeen would disown him altogether,' she says, when Mrs. St. John unadvisedly purrs forth a flattering prophecy concerning him. 'I wish you wouldn't praise him up to me, Marie,' her ladyship goes on fretfully, 'I always feel him a drag on our wheel. If it were not for him that goose Darragh would marry Lord Portbank; besides,' she adds, with an angry blush, 'I've other reasons for disliking him, and for wishing with all my heart that I might never hear of Arthur Thynne again.'

What these 'other reasons' are she does not say, but Mrs. St. John shrewdly suspects that one of the most cogent of them is that, failing male issue to the present Lord Killeen, the literary young agitator is heir to the title and estates. And up to the present time Lady Killeen is a childless woman!

But though Lady Killeen is indifferent to what may be passing between her husband and his cousin during this long privy council which they are holding, there is one with her who is almost agonizingly on the *qui vive* as to the result of it. Darragh knows that Arthur is going to ask something of his cousin this day which, if refused, will make him a reckless man, if not a desperate one. Already he has spent more borrowed money than he can hope to repay in certain expenses which he regards as necessary preliminaries to the

coming election. Now he wants funds from Lord Killeen in order that he may fight for a position in which he can powerfully advocate views to which Lord Killeen is staunchly opposed. He has been a bold man to go to his cousin this day with such a request ! But Darragh prays that his cool courage will meet with its due reward.

(‘If Harry acts for himself he will do a good-natured thing, even if he thinks it an unwise one ; but if he comes to his wife for an opinion she’ll give it against Arthur, and sneer at him for wanting it into the bargain. How I wish I could be with him ; how I wish Lady Killeen would go out and do some of her everlasting shopping.’)

Darragh thinks this as she sits in the morning-room with Lady Killeen. Lady Killeen is painting one of a set of dessert-plates ; she is a woman who prides herself upon being always employed, and really does do a vast number of things which are neither useful nor beautiful indifferently well. Darragh is doing—nothing ! that worst of sins in the eyes of busily idle people.

‘Are you going to waste the whole morning, Darragh ? the elder lady asks, looking up from the work which is growing under her brush. ‘You might just as well be out gaining health if you do nothing when you stay in.’

‘Killeen couldn’t ride with me this morning,’ Darragh says briefly.

‘Oh ! no, Arthur is taking up his time, I believe. I hope, now he has come to town, that he is not going to be an *habitué* of this house.’

‘Arthur, at least, is not apt to waste his time ; you needn’t fear that he will come here too often, Annette,’ Darragh says, so quietly that Lady Killeen is in doubt as to whether there is sarcastic meaning in the words or not. However, she resolves to tell her husband that ‘his cousin Darragh has

been very rude to her again this morning, and that, long-suffering as she is, she cannot be expected to put up with veiled insults for ever.'

Presently Darragh rises and moves towards the door. She can bear it no longer, this suspense ; she must find out what the men of her house are talking about.'

'Where are you going?' Lady Killeen asks sharply as Darragh opens the door, and Darragh, a little in resentment at the tone employed towards her, answers incisively—

'To the library—to my cousins !'

'You must do nothing of the kind, Darragh,' Lady Killeen says, looking up with scintillating eyes and a heightened colour. 'In my house, at least, you shall not run after Arthur Thynne——'

Still holding the door in her hand, Darragh wheels round suddenly, and leans her back against it in an attitude in which grace, ease, and defiance are superbly mingled.

'I forgot for a moment that this was not my father's house any longer, and only remembered that I was my father's daughter, free to go where and to whom I pleased ! But you have reminded me—effectually now !'

She has passed out of the room and closed the door behind her before Lady Killeen recovers her power of speech. By the time she has done this there is no one to listen to her, and her hand shakes too much from angry excitement for her to continue painting with anything like success. So she gets up and does the very thing Darragh has been hoping she will not do—goes to the library to her husband.

The interview has been a long and not altogether a pleasant or peaceful one. The favour which the younger cousin has asked of the elder involves so much, affects so many interests, that it has been asked with effort and refused with pain. But refused it has been definitely, and there are

marks of the storm and the conflict of feeling upon both men when Lady Killeen joins them.

It is true that they are smoking cigarettes of peace, and that they have been in opposition more or less violent to one another is plainly visible.

'You here, Arthur?' Lady Killeen says, in a way that is to lead him to suppose his presence is a surprise, and not too pleasant a one to her. 'I had an idea that you gentlemen of the press worked in the morning at least. I'm glad you can afford the time and money to waste in idleness and expensive cigars.'

'No; we work by night chiefly—like your ladyship and the moles—in the dark.'

'Arthur and I are having a business talk, Annette. We haven't finished it yet,' her husband puts in hurriedly, for he has a good-natured horror of wordy war and spiteful sparring, and he knows that Arthur is not in the mood now to bear insolent speeches peaceably.

Lord Killeen is very fond of his Annette, and really believes her to be a most excellent and superior person. But his regard for her does not blind him to the fact that she does not show the smoothest side of her character to his relations.

'And I shouldn't have interrupted your business talk if I had not been disturbed in my work—my painting—by Darragh,' Lady Killeen says, bridling her head, and speaking with an expression of dislike to Miss Thynne which makes Arthur's blood tingle in his veins. 'Like some other members of your family she makes a point of being the reverse of respectful to me; but this morning she has been downright rude—sneered at my being mistress of this house, and insinuated that she ought to hold the position, as it belonged to her father when he was alive, and] altogether

behaved in a way that has spoilt my morning's work and made me feel quite ill and hysterical.'

She gulps a sob up and then gulps it down again in order to prove the veracity of her statement as she says this, and looks at Arthur in a triumphantly vindictive way that makes him set his teeth fast in order to subdue the temptation to answer her. Lord Killeen fidgets, looks imploringly at her, and then, finding that she will not go till he has said something, attempts to smooth things over.

'I'm sorry you've been bothered, dear, and stopped in your painting. Such a lovely dessert-set Annette is painting! You must see it, Arthur,' Killeen says deprecatingly; but his wife is not to be diverted from her course of condemnation of his cousins by this obvious attempt to flatter her.

'Indeed, I shouldn't think of showing them to Mr. Thynne,' she says bitterly. 'I know too well the disparaging remarks that would be made "about" them, even if they were not made to me. I have not forgotten the way in which both your cousins derided my efforts to amuse those ungrateful people at Killeen. I shall not risk being subjected to that sort of thing again from Mr. Thynne.'

This was a reference to an abortive attempt Lady Killeen had made to sing Irish melodies to her own harp accompaniment to the tenants and labourers on Lord Killeen's hereditary estates. Her efforts on the occasion had been rewarded with much outspoken praise and gratitude from her audience, but neither Darragh nor Arthur had flattered her enough. They had simply told her it was 'very nice,' and she wanted it to be called a 'brilliant performance.'

'I'm sorry you won't let me see the plates,' Arthur says good-temperedly. He has got over his chagrin by this time, and merely feels profound pity for Killeen for being under the galling thumb of his exemplary wife. So he seeks

to make things pleasanter by saying he is sorry she won't let him see the plates, and then goes on to tell her a secret which he has only just learnt himself concerning the art of china-painting.

It is hard to receive valuable information which may be of real and immediate service to you from a person whom you abhor !

But Lady Killeen triumphs over this mean feeling to the extent of listening to what he tells her and determining to act upon it, for she does want to make the dessert-service a success ! It is to be shown, "not for competition," at an approaching big art exhibition, and she wants the world to see what an accomplished and industrious member of society she is, in addition to being Lady Killeen. So, though Killeen has refused his request, and Lady Killeen has stung him to the quick, Arthur presently leaves the house with the feeling that he has done and said nothing which may cause him to forfeit the privilege of returning to it.

'Can I see Darragh ?' he inquires as he is about to leave, finding that he is not to be asked to stay to luncheon.

'Darragh is out,' Lady Killeen says suavely, and as a cloud of disappointment darkens his face the amiable matron feels that she has scored another against him. Proud as she is of the title to which she has attained, and of her position as the wife of Lord Killeen, she is not at all disposed to regard Lord Killeen's family as anything but unpardonably presumptuous in being better born and bred than herself. Accordingly, on every occasion, she takes the opportunity of asserting her dignity and present superior social power before them, utterly regardless of the fact of her doing so being painful to her husband, who is full of the milk of human kindness, and of traditional strong, warm family feeling.

‘Tell her to write to me and say when she will be in. I want to see her and consult her about something,’ he says, and Lord Killeen nods assent, and says hurriedly :

‘All right, all right ! You must come here and dine one night before Annette and I run away to cool ourselves ; London’s a perfect oven now. Oddly enough, I can stand extreme heat anywhere but in London. Annette and I think of cruising about the Mediterranean coast next month. Annette’s such a capital sailor that I’m thinking of getting hold of a bigger yacht, and emulating the Masseys. The worst of it is Darragh doesn’t like the sea.’

‘I’m not going to be *entirely* tied by Darragh’s likes and dislikes,’ Lady Killeen says, swelling with importance. And then Arthur does finally take his departure, making up his mind as he goes that he must bestir himself in a hundred ways. Darragh has to be redeemed from slavery—as well as Ireland !

It is a mere trifle to Lady Killeen that her husband finds out that Darragh is at home almost the minute after Arthur has left the house.

‘*In* was she, all the time?’ she says. ‘To tell the truth, I was not too anxious to know where she was ; she has so thoroughly upset and offended me this morning. Before you, of course, Darragh is always polite and pleasant enough, but I can’t describe to you how I have to suffer from her impertinences when you are not by ; she always takes care to make me remember that though my husband has a title my father had none, and I never retort, though there are many things I might say if I liked to be ungenerous.’

‘I am always awfully sorry when I hear of Darragh and you not getting on together,’ he says, with genuine concern, for ‘blood is thicker than water,’ and he likes his cousin

well, but at the same time his Annette has a sway over him which he does not care to resist. It is the sway of unswerving selfishness.

Mr. Thynne's meditations are of rather a sombre nature as he walks away to his club from his cousin's house. Killeen is an excellent fellow, open-hearted, open-handed, as a rule, but on the present occasion he has shut his hand against Arthur in a most unmistakable way. 'It is a great pity,' Mr. Thynne feels, for a little money honourably and judiciously disbursed at the present juncture in the West of Ireland would have secured his return by a majority of temperate and right-feeling men! As it is! 'Well, as it is I shall have to go in for the whole thing, and hold out a hand to the Land League men,' he tells himself, and he is almost surprised at feeling a doubt as to whether the Land League men will take the proffered hand.

As a beginning he goes to his own rooms instead of to his club, and writes off in hot haste an article for a Liberal London paper, in which he commits himself to such extreme Home Rule views that he will have great difficulty in ever suggesting moderation again—that is, if his article lives in the memory of any man beyond the hour, which as a journalist he knows is an extremely improbable contingency. But the mere act of writing 'settles him in his saddle,' and fixes him more firmly than ever in his determination to ride his hobby of a free and happy Ireland for the Irish to the end—whether bitter or not.

And when he has sent his copy in, and there is no possibility of revising it, he writes to Darragh for her opinion, and to Mrs. St. John for applause.

CHAPTER VII.

BENEATH THE VEIL.

THERE is a sound of wedding bells down at that prettiest of Surrey churches that stands on a beautiful piece of ground where churchyard merges almost imperceptibly into vicarage garden at Weybridge. The rich Mr. Lepell's daughter Marian is to be married this day to the rising London surgeon, Mr. Annesley—the son of a man who bore a high professional reputation, and won much social esteem in and around Walton and its neighbourhood while he lived.

MATTERS have not gone altogether smoothly between Robert Annesley and his betrothed, or rather the family of his betrothed, of late. They have none of them taken graciously to what they call his 'Irish folly,' and he, on his side, has not taken their inquiries and investigations and general carping at and tilting against the plan well. He has neither looked grateful nor gratified when his future father-in-law has expressed an earnest desire to go over himself, with a competent English lawyer on whom he (Mr. Lepell) can rely, and look into the leases and agreements held by the different tenants on the Darragh estate.

HE has even gone so far as to definitely refuse to tell any of them—even Marian—what sum he has paid for the property, and this contumaciousness of his has been productive of much gloom hanging over his relations with the Lepells.

BUT it must be granted to him that during these few months, since Darragh has been his own, Mr. Annesley has not neglected his practice or let slip a single chance of forwarding his professional career in London. He has worked nobly and well, early and late; worked as one who

loves his fellow men as well as himself, and he has won his reward ! A splendid practice among those who suffer more from a superfluity of the good things of this world rather than from privation is his, and his name as their best guide and friend physically is on countless self-indulgent sufferers' lips. On the whole, when Marian reflects on the long list of his fashionable clients, she is inclined to be well satisfied with the position she will have as his wife in Cavendish Square.

But latterly he has propounded some startling views, which nearly shatter his engagement and entirely destroy the Lepells' faith in his good sense. He takes a partner in, but as he only does this for a handsome consideration they look upon his surrendering the supreme power in the practice leniently. But their wrath knows no bounds when he announces that for the future he shall transfer his sphere of usefulness from the West End of London, where there are thousands of men as able as himself, to the West of Ireland, where sickness and suffering, caused by gaunt want and neglect, claim his sympathy and skill.

He is a bright-hearted, easy-going man, and up to this juncture the Lepells have had no idea of the steadfastness of purpose he can oppose to their united disapprobation of his project. They put before him eloquently that he would damage the interest of his unborn family by taking this step, and that he will be condemning Marian to a life of desolation, perhaps of danger ! His answer to this is that he has incurred responsibilities towards the living which he considers have a higher claim upon him than those he may never be called upon to undertake towards a family that may never exist ; and that if Marian has a proper affection for him, she will find her highest pleasure in aiding him to do his duty towards those for whose welfare he has become

surety by his purchase of the land on which they live ! Hints to the effect that, under these peculiarly painful circumstances, he must not be surprised if the engagement is broken off till he comes to his senses are met by him with the assurance that 'whatever Marian may elect to do he will not blame her, however deeply he may regret the step.' Altogether he is impracticable, and as Marian sees no immediate chance of making a better match and is really fond of him, in a way that is perhaps more lasting than a more demonstrative affection might prove, the engagement continues, and is about to come to an end happily in Weybridge Church on this cold, clear January morning.

It is six months since the purchase of Darragh has been completed, and though it has not been convenient for Robert Annesley to receive any of his rents—or rather, though it has not been convenient for his tenants to pay them—he regards himself as a happy and prosperous man this day, for he is the owner of a beautiful unencumbered estate, and is enabled by the sale of his share in the West-end practice, and one or two other things, to settle ten thousand pounds on his bride.

There does not seem to be the least difficulty in his doing this, and only Dolly knows that *her* ten thousand is floating about somewhere, quite out of her jurisdiction and control, and that Robert has promised to restore it to her soon, 'before the Mackivers begin making terms.'

For it has come by this time to a regular engagement between Dolly and Ronald Mackiver, the young soldier, who has not much besides his pay, and who is regarded by his parents as a great prize in the matrimonial market.

Though it is January, it might be June to judge from the quantity and beauty of the flowers which deck every inch of the bride's way to-day. The hothouses have been stripped

for the sake of the house, and banks of roses, gardenias, camellias red and white, drooping white lilies, and masses of Russian and Neapolitan violets rise in the hall, on the staircases, and in every reception-room. The breakfast has been arranged by Gunter for upwards of two hundred guests, and the wedding cake is as colossal as its ornaments are unique. In place of the usual monster vase of flowers and cupids in white sugar is an exquisitely moulded harp, with groups of shamrock springing up around it.

‘In compliment to my son-in-law, who has large estates in Ireland,’ Mrs. Lepell exclaims graciously to some of her guests, carrying out her resolution to make the best of what she regards as rather a bad business.

Of course the Killeens are at the wedding. Darragh, in fact, is one of the twelve bridesmaids in ruby plush and ivory-white silk. And the Mackivers are here in right of Dolly, and Arthur Thynne, because that ‘dear little Mrs. St. John’ has made a point of his being asked. Mrs. St. John has written an ode on the auspicious event, which is printed on white satin and laid before each guest—a sweet and judicious set of verses, in which she describes the virtues and talents and general graces of the bride’s parents in terms that rather surprise some of their oldest friends. As for the bridegroom, he comes in for rather a curt mention ; in fact, he is merely cautioned to take care of the precious treasure confided to his care by those who have the royalty of real parenthood stamped upon their lofty, loving brows. The ode goes on to describe Mr. Lepell as an Agamemnon of commerce, and Mrs. Lepell as a queen among mothers and women ! Altogether, Mrs. St. John may be fairly said to deserve the hundred-pound note which is sent to her anonymously on the evening of this glad day. It is notorious that after this event the little mistress of

popular fiction speaks of Mr. Lepell as her best and dearest benefactor and friend—next, of course, to sweet, clever Mrs. Lepell, who must always have the foremost place in all well-regulated hearts and minds. After a time ‘the ode,’ and some of the reflections it awakes, is a thorn in good Mrs. Lepell’s flesh, for men do not win the title of ‘best and dearest of benefactors’ to impecunious genius of either sex without some outlay. Mrs. Lepell has hedged her husband in effectually from the sordid advances of his own cousins, aunts, nieces, and nephews, but from this sweet stranger, who never addresses either of them save with the most honeyed words and the most sunny smiles, she cannot fence him off, and her own vanity will not permit her to say that Mrs. St. John’s adulation is interested.

The old Mackivers, cautious Scots who, having a little money of their own, are keenly alive to the value of it in others with whom they may become connected through Ronald’s marriage, are shocked into silence during the banquet by the vainglorious display.

All the pomp and circumstance of the event strikes them as ‘just wicked waste,’ and when they reflect on the possibility of Dolly being tempted to waste a portion of her own ten thousand pounds in a similar marriage spectacle, they shrink with horror from the alliance, and determine to point out the drawbacks of it pretty plainly to Ronald.

In the meantime, they enjoy the glory and goodness of it all quite as heartily as the rest of the guests, and at the same time revel in a sense of superiority on account of the way in which they ‘condemn’ this reckless waste to each other.

Old Mrs. Mackiver ranges up alongside of Dolly, when they are all standing in the hall in two long lines, through which the bride has to pass in triumph on her way out to

the carriage. As Marian passes along, leaning on her father's arm, in her golden brown plush and sables, for which she has exchanged the bridal robe of white velvet and Mechlin lace, Mrs. Mackiver whispers to her son's choice:

'I hope to see more sensible gowns on your back on your wedding-day, Dolly. Your brother's wife has the worth of one of his Irish farms on her back this moment.'

'I hope not,' Dolly laughs unconcernedly. 'Robert and I hope that our speculation means more than a few rich suits of velvet and fur, a fear——,' then she pauses in confusion, remembering that Robert has counselled her not to tell the Mackivers of her share in the Darragh business yet.

'Your speculation! I hope you haven't been crazy enough to put any of your money into Irish land?' the old Scotch lady asks sternly. 'Remember that it isn't yours to play fast and loose with, now that you have promised yourself to my son, and bear in mind that you'll want all you have for yourself and the children God may give to you; it's due to Ronald now that you consult him about everything you do.'

'I shall always render his full due to Ronald,' Dolly says quietly, but she does not feel called upon to tell Ronald's masterful mother that for a time her brother has the use of her capital. She will tell Ronald how things are when money matters are discussed, but up to the present time he has not broached them.

'Dear old boy! I'd trust the wealth of the world to him if I had it,' she thinks, as her brother approaches her to bid her good-bye, and to remind her that she must be at Darragh to receive them, and have all ready for them by the middle of February.

'Get Miss Thynne to stay there with you, dear; it will be dull for you alone till Marian and I come home, and

Miss Thynne, with her enthusiasm for the place and the people, will be a wonderful help to you.'

'I don't think Miss Thynne likes me,' Dolly says, hurriedly; 'she seems to keep both Ronald and me at a greater distance than she does other people.'

'Nonsense!' is all he can find time to whisper, for a dozen or more people are about him now, shaking his hands, clapping him on the back, and showering rice and good wishes upon him. It is astounding to find what a number of people who knew nothing of him before this supreme moment discover him to be an uncommonly good fellow now. Even Mrs. Mackiver's grimness relaxes as she tells him in moderate language that she trusts he 'may never repent of what he has done to-day,' and his five sisters-in-law wreath themselves round him like one woman, and adjure him passionately 'to take care of Marian, and to have them over soon to stay with him' in Galway. It has come to their knowledge that certain regiments are ordered into Galway city from the Curragh, and these younger members of the house of Lepell are still innocent and unworldly enough to like 'officers,' though it has been persistently borne in upon them that the genus is a penniless one and unworthy of cultivation. The prospect of unrestricted festive intercourse with some of these bright but withal tabooed beings from the vantage-ground of their brother-in-law's place in Ireland, with no parental eye upon them, and no parental forebodings sounding in their ears, seems good to them. So they lavish much sisterly affection with artless openness upon Robert Annesley, and persuade him that if he wants to make his wife *really* happy, he will soon ask several of her sisters to be her guests.

There are only two discordant chords struck in the gay melody to which all things seem to set themselves this day.

One jars painfully on Mr. Lepell's ear, the other on the ear of the bridegroom.

'It's not true that things are not looking well at "The Bullion," is it?' an old gentleman, a brother-director and extensive shareholder of the mighty assurance office he names, asks Mr. Lepell in the course of the after-dinner chat, when the havoc and splendour of the marriage feast are matters some hours gone by.

'You ought to know as much about it as I do,' Mr. Lepell says, smiling confidently. 'My dear sir, the credit of The Bullion can no more be shaken than that of the Bank of England; there is nothing to prevent The Bullion lasting while the world does. I, at least, ought to know, and I can affirm that much.'

'I hope you will be able to affirm that much to-morrow, when you are likely to hear more about it,' his friend responds dolefully; and a painful feeling of doubt of that of which he has hitherto been so proudly confident assails Mr. Lepell's heart, and makes his daughter's wedding-day one of the gloomiest he has known.

The other discordant note is struck by old Mr. Mackiver, and falls on Robert Annesley's ear just as he is about to follow his bride into her carriage.

'Good-bye,' Ronald's excellent, prudent old father says, clapping Mr. Annesley on the back in token of the utmost goodwill and confidence; 'I shall be writing to you soon about my boy and Dolly; my lawyer has got it all cut and dried, and you'll find he has put it down all pleasant and fair for both parties——'

'All right! good-bye,' Robert Annesley shouts out; but a little demon of care gets into the carriage with him, who is not easily exorcised.

They have a dance to wind up with in the evening, and

one or two fashionable papers have an account of the wedding and of all appertaining to it in a few days, with a list of the presents that 'were worthy of a royal bride,' and encomiums on the 'princely munificence and magnificent hospitality of the bride's father.' The journals of the following day tell a widely different and far sadder tale. The Bullion has exploded, and Mr. Lepell has fled from the country a broken-hearted bankrupt.

Fortunately for the newly-married pair they have a few days of sunshine before this dire calamity is made known to them through the medium of newspapers abroad and letters from home. It is an appalling blow, and it hits them both with cruel severity. Marian's first feeling is one of anguish for herself; she has been so proud of the perfect independence which her father has promised to secure to her. Now her promised fortune will be swallowed up with the rest. Her second thought, to do her justice, is for her mother and sisters.

'Oh! mamma, mamma, and the poor girls!' she sobs. 'Robert, tell me at once, they shall live with us, shan't they? You will let them share my home, if you love me?'

'There's a silver lining to every cloud indeed!' Robert Annesley thinks, as his wife exhibits unselfishness and loving anxiety for her mother and sisters when the shock of this home-trouble first falls upon them. The Bullion may have exploded, but he has found real gold, he flatters himself, in the heart of his wife.

'Poor papa!' Marian says this a dozen times during the first day or two after the sorrowful news reaches them. Occasionally too she wonders where he is, and expresses a fervent hope that he will soon ask some of his old wealthy friends to help him out of his difficulties, and make things comfortable for him again! It does not occur to the

daughter of the late millionaire that these difficulties are utter ruin and commercial disgrace. Individually, Mr. Lepell has done nothing dishonourable, but his name has been on the direction of a fraudulently bankrupt company; the liabilities are limited, but Mr. Lepell will never hold his head up in England again.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE MACKIVERS'.

AFTER her brother's marriage, during the brief interval between the wedding and the news about The Bullion becoming public property, Dolly Annesley makes an effort to carry out her brother's latest instructions by asking the Honourable Miss Thynne to be her guest and companion at Darragh.

Dolly is staying with the Mackivers, for the house in Cavendish Square has been let partially furnished, and though the Mackivers' *ménage* is not a very bright or pleasant one, Dolly is perfectly happy in it, for Ronald runs up from Aldershot to see her three or four times a week.

The situation of the house is against it, for it is on the sunless side of Russell Square, and the internal decorations and furniture are more against it still. Everything in it is solid, handsome, and heavy: the dining-room in horse-hair and mahogany, the drawing-room in rosewood and drab damask, and the breakfast-room in everything that is not wanted in any other room in the house. A few pictures are skied on the walls of the two principal rooms, a couple of plaster statues hold gas-jets in niches on the staircase,

and a few huge Japanese and Chinese vases and bowls are standing about, containing a fragrant mixture of dried rose leaves, bay salt, and herbs that are more highly perfumed in death than in life. These constitute the whole art decoration of the Mackiver mansion, and amply express the whole art-feeling of its occupants. 'Everything for comfort and nothing for show,' is their motto, they tell Dolly, and sometimes they express a hope that when she enters the family she will follow its example.

The family is not a large one. Mr. and Mrs. Mackiver, their son Ronald and their daughter Mary, are the sole members of it. That they have kept their family within such moderate dimensions is one of the many things of which Mr. and Mrs. Mackiver are perhaps a little unduly proud. They are religious people, leaving everything to Providence verbally; but they do think harsh things of any people who, being poorer than themselves, presume to have more children than they are satisfied with.

The household arrangements move on like clockwork. Mr. Mackiver has long since retired from business, and is now merely a sleeping partner in the 'house' which he made by his energy and perseverance. Mrs. Mackiver dislikes any interruption to the daily routine, which has been strictly observed ever since they came to live here, twenty years ago. And Mary is a 'daughter who is like unto her mother,' as the Scriptures declare a daughter shall be.

Mary Mackiver is endowed with many admirable and likeable qualities, but she is not a lovable woman. There is nothing soft about her externally. When she says a kind and generous thing she says it in a tone that takes the warmth out of the kindness and the grace out of the generosity. Her voice is harsh, deep-toned, with a rasp in it that is probably due to the effects of the bitter blasts up in the

North where she was born. But this voice is never heard in unjust condemnation, nor in propagation of a scandal, nor in the utterance of idle and malicious words. She is not demonstrative ; she never deigns to be tender or winning, but she is essentially trustworthy, and to be relied upon in any emergency, as she is not carried away by what other people say or think, but is influenced solely by her own knowledge of what is right or wrong.

It is this quality which has made Ronald regard her as his best and wisest friend from his boyhood. And it is to this wisest friend he goes for counsel when, on arriving home one day, he finds that Dolly has gone to call on Darragh Thynne.

‘What has taken Dolly there, Mary?’ he asks ; ‘there has never been anything like friendship or intimacy between those two girls. Why should Dolly go to Miss Thynne now?’

‘Dolly knows of no reason why she shouldn’t obey her brother’s wishes. Do you?’ Miss Mackiver asks, looking Ronald straight in the eyes in the way that has always made him feel he would be weak indeed to attempt to deceive her.

‘What have her brother’s wishes to do with her calling on Miss Thynne?’ he says uneasily ; and she tells him.

‘Earnestly Mr. Annesley asked her, just as he was going away on his wedding-day, to get Miss Thynne over to Darragh, as she would greatly help them in getting to know the people on the land.’

‘I’m sorry,’ he says shortly. Then, after a moment or two, he adds, ‘But it can’t be helped if Miss Thynne accepts the invitation. I hope she won’t, for I’m ordered to Dublin, and I hoped to have seen a little of Darragh—the place, I mean.’

He flushes as he says what he means, and his sister asks him—

‘And you don’t want to see Darragh the person—is that it, Ronald?’

‘That’s it.’

‘Is it because you don’t like her?’

He shakes his head.

‘It’s not because you like her too well, I hope?’ he says harshly; but he knows that the harshness is only in the voice, and that he may safely trust her now as heretofore.

‘I do like her too well to wish to see much more of her; I love Dolly too well to care to run any risk of becoming interested in Darragh’s wild, beautiful, visionary ways. She’s a dangerous girl, with her mixture of native impulse and cultured repression, and I don’t want to be led into making a study of her—perhaps to the neglect of Dolly.’

‘She’s a dangerous girl if she has made you false in heart to Dolly, who wouldn’t break faith with a dog, much less with a man,’ Miss Mackiver replies; and then her brother assures her that his heart is true as steel to Dolly, that he is delighted that his honour is irrevocably pledged to her, but that as he would be dazzled by a gorgeous sunrise, attracted by a shooting star, fancy-bound by a strain of fairy music, so is he dazzled, attracted, and fancy-bound by the Irish girl, whose violet eyes hold all that is best of dark and bright—of pathos, poetry, and pain, seen through a smile that is like a sunbeam.

‘Does *she* know you are such a weathercock?’ Mary asks.

He does not like the epithet, but he wants her opinion and her help, and he knows from experience that she will give both to him, but that she will do it in her own way. Accordingly, he does not resent the imputation, but answers straight to the point—

‘Hasn’t an idea of it, I should say; I have never said a word——’

'Stop ! have you *looked* a meaning ?'

'I think not,' he falters.

'Then you have, if you only *think* you haven't ! Ronald dear, check your thoughts, hold them in with a good man's strong will, for fear you become a traitor in them to both these young ladies. Dolly is your love, and I hope she'll be your wife, and you must never look on Miss Thynne's face again, till you can do so as you wouldn't mind any man in the world looking on Dolly's face ; resist the temptation. If you knew looking at a gorgeous sunrise would dazzle you so that you must fall over a precipice and be broken to pieces, you wouldn't look, would you ? If you knew the shooting-star would lead you into a morass from whence you'd never extricate yourself, you'd shut your eyes rather than follow its course ; and if the fairy music dulled your ears to the voice of truth and honour, you'd sit out of hearing of the strain ? I'm sure you would, and you will do so now.'

She is a plain young woman with dull yellow hair, freckles, and a figure that has more of the rigidity of iron than the suppleness of steel about it. But her brother almost worships the true womanly element in her as she speaks thus, and the devil who has been tempting him with unconscious Darragh is so nearly exorcised that Ronald believes it has ceased to tempt him.

'I think Darragh—Miss Thynne, I mean—may go with Dolly, if they both like it, Mary ; when I go there when Robert comes home my little love's sweet brown velvet eyes shall hold a greater spell for me than sunrises and shooting stars. My folly is past, Mary, and thank God neither Dolly nor Darragh knows anything of it.'

'Are you sure ? And they're both women ! It seems to me, if I were Dolly or Darragh I'd have known fast enough,'

Miss Mackiver says thoughtfully ; and then Ronald wonders, as he has occasionally wondered before, whether his sister has ever had a lover's look levelled at her or listened to a lover's tones. 'She seems hard and uncompromising enough on the surface, but she understands the real thing, and no mistake,' the young man tells himself. But before he can hazard a question on this point, his mother comes in and tells them that it 'is time for them to begin expecting Dolly home.' Mrs. Mackiver is one of those rigid punctualists who have a time for everything, even for beginning to expect anything that it is in the order of things will happen.

'And before she comes, your father wants to speak to you, Ronald,' the old lady goes on ; 'he has seen something in the paper that will make a great difference to the Annesleys' worldly prospects, I'm afraid.'

So, prepared for something bad, but not for the worst that it seems possible can happen to 'Mrs. Annesley's people,' Ronald goes into the arid, cleanly, light little morning-room, where everything seems to be asserting that it is meant for utility, and not for show, and hears from his father the story of what has befallen The Bullion and Mr. Lepell.

'Robert Annesley will be shackled with the whole family, and it will be well for you if he doesn't impoverish himself, and come to his sister by-and-by for help,' the old gentleman says emphatically. 'For Dolly's sake you will do well to hasten your marriage while her money is untouched.'

'Her being married won't make much difference if she wants to lend any money to her brother,' Ronald says, speaking and feeling magnanimously, as it is the custom for the most exacting, self-asserting, and mercenary man to speak before the woman becomes his wife, and her money his goods and chattels, and as it is not possible for the most single-

mind and unselfish man to feel after he and the woman become one, and their interests are indivisible.

'I hope it will make a difference, a very considerable difference too,' old Mackiver says heavily; and Ronald promises himself that if Robert Annesley ever commits the misdemeanour of wanting to borrow money of Dolly, he (Ronald) will not go to his father with a confession of his folly in permitting his wife to lend it.

How far away he is from suspecting even that his sweetheart has lent it already! Not only some of it, but the whole of it; and not only the whole, but that whole is in jeopardy!

'Dolly speaks of going over to Ireland early next week,' Mr. Mackiver goes on. 'Your mother and I think it quite unnecessary. Mrs. Annesley ought to be able to get her own house in order when she comes back, instead of lazily relying on her young sister-in-law to do it for her. Your mother and I propose, in fact, that Dolly should remain here until your marriage. Have you any objection to offer to the plan, Ronald?'

'No; but I think Dolly will have many. Always ready to make the best of everything for other people, as Dolly is, she would make a stand at once if her *amour-propre* were wounded; and I think it would be by the suggestion that she should be married from any other house than her brother's.'

'That spirit savours of wicked pride—pride that goeth before destruction, and the haughty spirit that shall have a fall,' Mr. Mackiver says reprovingly. 'Her brother's house, maybe, will be no home for her in a short time, and you ought to be thankful that your mother and I are willing to take her as a daughter in love before she is one in law.'

'I'll speak to Mary,' Ronald says, feeling worried, and both father and son know that there is safety in that course—

safety in Mary's sagacity and rectitude, though possibly not pleasantness in the paths which she may point out to them.

To them, in the course of half-an-hour or so, Dolly comes in; Dolly with her family faith in all things undisturbed, Dolly with her unconscious self-sufficiency intact.

'There is something a little wrong about the Lepells; some screw gone loose in The Bullion,' she says. 'Robert has sent a telegram to Lord Killeen—odd he didn't send it to me straight—asking him to get me over to Ireland without delay and to send Darragh with me. Isn't it strange, Ronald? Miss Thynne has agreed to go to Darragh now as *our* guest! Isn't she good? isn't it noble of her?'

'I almost wish you would stay here instead,' Ronald says suggestively; but Dolly scoffs at the idea at once.

'Why, Robert wants me over there!' she says; 'he and I know exactly how to do things for the best for each other, and you wouldn't wish me not to do my best for my brother, would you, Ronald?'

No! Ronald would certainly not wish that; he only would wish to get Dolly to himself 'out of it all' as soon as possible.

'*This is what's* wrong about The Bullion,' Mr. Mackiver says, tapping the paper sharply. Then he hands it to Dolly, who reads that the glittering fabric of wealth which has been raised over the Lepell family has fallen in and crushed the head of the house in its ruins.

'It will nearly break poor Marian's heart,' she cries, tears of tender compassion springing from her eyes. 'She is so fond of them all—they are such a united, attached family; parting from them was a terrible trial, though she left them in such luxury, and thought it was sure to last; it will nearly break her heart to think of them in poverty and sorrow.'

'And all that wicked waste and extravagance at the

wedding will rise up in their memories and mock them; they'll feel now what a sin it was to make such a vain and extravagant display,' Mrs. Mackiver, who has come in to assist in the debate on the Lepell downfall, says, with a mixture of censure and pity.

'The wedding was only in keeping with the style they have always lived in; it would have been mean if they, with all their wealth, had lived like people with a moderate income,' Dolly says, defending them now that they are down, though her taste has often revolted at the Lepell lavishness in days gone by.

'And what, I ask, will become of the unfortunate woman and her daughters now?' Mr. Mackiver says solemnly.

'They're a lot of idle young leddies. They can neither toil nor spin, I fear,' his wife puts in, shaking her head reprovingly. 'Take warning by their case, Dolly, and if you are ever blessed with daughters, bring them up usefully, so that if hard times come upon them, they will be able to work and maintain themselves.'

'I'm afraid I shouldn't be able to maintain *myself* if hard times came upon me,' Dolly replies, ignoring the reference to her unborn daughters.

'Your father was a worthy man, and provided amply against such necessity on your part, my dear,' Mr. Mackiver says approvingly; and Dolly feels that the moment has come when reticence will merge into duplicity, if she any longer conceals from the Mackivers the fact of her having lent the ten thousand pounds which her father left her to Robert to invest in Darragh.

There is a great struggle in the girl's mind for a few moments. It has been the habit of her life to be loyal in all things great and small to her brother, but now another man has a right to her allegiance, to her fullest confidence and

unbounded trust. She is quite conscience-free ; when she lent the money to Robert, Captain Mackiver had no claim upon her, no right to expect that she should consult or confide in him. But now she is engaged to become his wife, pledged to promise and vow to honour, obey, and reverence him 'till death do them part.' Clearly the moment has come when she must tell him that her fortune is no longer under her own control, now that his father has referred to it as to a thing well-assured and safely secured to her.

It is a hard task, but Dolly is not the girl to shrink from a task because it is hard. As far as she herself is concerned, the ultimate fate of the money she has lent to her brother does not cause her the least uneasiness. He will give it back to her sooner or later ; of that she is sure. Meantime——

Ah ! meantime Ronald has to be considered ; and not Ronald only, but his father and mother, who may think that he ought to have the use and control of the money of the girl he is going to marry as soon as he marries her.

Hard task as it is, it has to be done, however. So Dolly does it.

'Hard times may come upon me, though my dear father did provide well for me, Mr. Mackiver ; hard times may come to Robert about his Irish property ; and if they do I shall not be so well off as my father wished to leave me, because I have lent the money to Robert.'

Even Ronald opens his eyes, more in surprise than admiration, as he hears this statement ; while, as for Mr. and Mrs. Mackiver, annoyance almost overcomes whatever of astonishment they may be feeling. Words come without loss to make that feeling clear.

CHAPTER IX.

WOMANLY, BUT NOT WEAK!

‘I SHALL make a point of writing to your brother about the matter without delay. Until he gives you—or me—a sure guarantee that the money will be repaid within a specific time, and promises to pay the interest regularly, I shall think that the thing looks bad.’

Mr. Mackiver is the speaker, and he is evidently speaking more in anger than in sorrow.

‘Pays the interest regularly! What do you mean, Mr. Mackiver? I am not going to make my brother pay me for the use of my money! Please don’t think of suggesting such a thing to him; he will do it at once if you do, and I shall feel as if I were the one who was distrusting him. Don’t do it; let things be as they are. It will be all right, won’t it, Ronald?’

She speaks eagerly and earnestly, and turns to her lover with confidence. That he will be on her side she does not seem to doubt for a moment, and probably if his practical parent were not present, he would slide over the difficulty for the present only to let it recur in a more unpleasant form on some future occasion.

‘It will be all right if my father and Robert come to an understanding about it, dear,’ he says hesitatingly; ‘it would be much better that a business matter should be put on a business footing. Robert himself will wish that it should be so.’

‘I don’t think Robert will like any outside interference between *us*,’ Dolly says, with emphasis. ‘When I offered it to him I was free to do what I liked with my own, wasn’t I?’

‘Unquestionably.’ She has appealed to Captain Mackiver’s sense of justice, and he answers her according to it, though he wishes that she had not made the appeal.

‘Don’t speak stiffly,’ she pleads, understanding his expression in a moment; ‘it is so very much to me that there should be no clashing of feeling between Robert and you; wait till you are his brother to arrange with him as to how and when the money shall be repaid; then he and you will have the same interest, and——’

‘I shall not give my consent to my son’s marrying till I know that he has been provident enough to protect the interests of the children you may bring him, Dolly. They ought to be more to him than your brother.’

Tears of uncertainty and bewilderment come into the girl’s eyes as Ronald’s father speaks to her thus: of uncertainty as to whether she can be loyal to these two men who are the dearest to her in all the world; of bewilderment as to whether Ronald is sympathizing with her, or with his just and straightforward father. She drives these tears back with a vigorous effort. They *shall not* fall and render her plain and incoherent, when, by looking nice and speaking eloquently, she may carry her point.

‘Dear Ronald, tell your father that if I were not so sure that my interests were as safe in my brother’s hands as in any other human being’s, I would not have spoken so confidently of the time when you would be Robert’s brother.’

There is a touch of pride in these loving words that makes her hearers listen to them. Mrs. Mackiver takes Dolly’s hand and pats it, but at the same time she tells the girl that she ‘must let wiser heads than her own judge for her.’ And Ronald says:

‘Dolly, darling, you mustn’t think that my father distrusts Robert’s prudence for a moment.’

‘Eh! it’s just that I do distrust,’ Mr. Mackiver puts in. ‘“Robert’s prudence” is one of the things heard of, but unseen, I’m thinking; and if I don’t hold out now, Dolly may have as little reason to thank her father-in-law by-and-by as I think she has to thank her brother now.’

‘And Robert has made me his friend, as well as his sister! Consulted me about everything, and trusted me with everything!’ Dolly cries out in sorrowfully tender protest. ‘Oh, Ronald! whatever you do, or say is to be done, don’t teach Robert to think that I love him less because I love you more! My brother, who has taken care of me all my life!’

She does not wait to hear Ronald’s answer, but gets herself out of the room as quickly as she can. There is no wrath in her heart against Mr. Mackiver, though he has wounded her to the core by his implied suspicions of her brother. But real grief reigns in her breast as she reflects that she is to be made the cause, unwillingly enough, of extra anxiety and trouble to Robert ‘just now, when he will have so much to harass and vex him about the Lepells,’ as she thinks. Moreover, there is another sting in what has just taken place which she can hardly bring herself to acknowledge she has been hurt by, and which yet does hurt her considerably. It is this: Ronald’s love for her is strong, good, and true, doubtless, as he is a strong, good, and true man; but she has discovered in the course of the last half-hour that other considerations than herself alone enter into this love of his. He can think of money in connection with her.

While Dolly is feeling wounded and heart-sore because the superhuman tact is not bestowed upon her by which she can hope to blend and assimilate the strongly contending interests of her brother and her lover, while she is only

longing to do what is kindest and best for them both, Mr. Mackiver is saying to his son :

‘I’m afraid there’s a vein of firmness in Dolly which will run into obstinacy if you don’t take care ; justifying her brother’s conduct against our opinion in the way she did, shows me we must be careful.’

‘Dolly’s perfect. I wouldn’t see her altered by a hair’s breadth,’ Ronald says hurriedly ; and then he adds, ‘but I think Robert’s a bit of a humbug.’

The remainder of this day does not pass pleasantly either for Dolly or Captain Mackiver. Each has a feeling that a jarring chord has been struck, and that the music of the future will not be as softly sweet for them again as the music of the past has been. The knowledge that Ronald is not as ready to rely upon her brother’s judgment and prudence as she has been is a shock to the girl’s ardent faith in both men. And on his side Captain Mackiver is a little hurt—not ‘annoyed’ or in the least degree ‘angry’—but just a trifle hurt that Dolly should display such readiness to hold to her own opinion, and her own way of doing things against his father’s counsel and advice.

In fact, it is the old, old story ! The man has fallen in love with the girl for being what she is, and now that the love is an accepted and acknowledged thing, he wants to alter her a little !—to mould her into something more in accordance with his ideas of perfection in woman, to destroy the very individuality that won his love.

Mr. and Mrs. Mackiver are not conducive to the re-establishment of thorough harmony and a cordial appreciation of each other’s motives between these young people at this juncture. Mrs. Mackiver says too much about its being the duty and privilege of a wife to ‘give in to her husband,’ and suggests that there is something extra praise-

worthy about those young women who extend their duties and privileges to the point of 'giving in' to their husbands' relations—especially their parents. And Mr. Mackiver says things that are even harder to bear. He speaks about the dismal prospects of landowners in Ireland, and avows with heat and force that it is 'culpable fool's hardihood on the part of any one who has not inherited the doubtful blessings of an Irish estate to invest money, time, and life in one.'

'The people have been badly managed, and the landlords have themselves, and themselves only, to thank for what is occurring, and for the worse that is to follow,' he says, reverting to the subject of Darragh during dinner on this uncomfortable day. 'Your brother may be exemplary and without reproach in his management, but he'll have to suffer for the mismanagement of those who went before, mark my words.'

'Lord Killeen has always shown generous consideration for his tenants and dependents; and his uncle, the late lord — Darragh Thynne's father — was positively adored there,' Dolly says.

'Your brother can't expect much, or he wouldn't think it necessary to get Miss Thynne over there as a go-between,' Mr. Mackiver says testily.

And then Dolly retorts indignantly that her brother does 'not need any go-between,' that his kind-heartedness and clear-headedness will be his best and only guides to the regard and trust of the people among whom he is going, and that he has asked Darragh Thynne to be their guest for the sake of pleasing the people among whom she has been brought up, rather than with any idea of getting her to induce them to regard himself more favourably.

All this and much more Dolly says, and Ronald can find no flaw in her manner nor in her meaning. Nevertheless he wishes that neither were quite so pronounced, and to

his own dismay he finds himself thinking, 'Darragh will put her lover first in everything; the man who wins her will not find her putting a brother before him in any way;' which is a true and right reflection on his part, for Darragh has no brother to put before either her lover or herself.

In a few days it becomes a matter of pressing importance that something should be settled about Dolly's journey to Ireland, and her establishing herself as her brother's *locum tenens*. In the spirit of reliance that is characteristic of her age, Miss Annesley declares herself to be quite ready to go over and trust to fate about getting the existing *ménage* at Darragh into working order unassisted. But Mrs. Mackiver demurs to this.

'What you want, and what you must have, Dolly, is a staid, middle-aged woman, who has lived in good English families, and who will be able to regulate the work, and show the others how it ought to be done; my cook happens to know of just such a person who will be the very thing for you; she's out of employ just now, poor body, in consequence of having had an illness; but I should say she's a real treasure.'

'If I were Dolly I wouldn't hamper myself with this woman, who's as much a stranger to her as the Irish servants will be,' Miss Mackiver puts in.

'She's a *splendid* cook, has been employed as an extra by one of the first cooks and confectioners in Brighton for years,' Mrs. Mackiver persists. 'She would be invaluable to your sister-in-law, Dolly; such a cook is not to be picked up every day, I can assure you; I had her here once, on the occasion of one of Mr. Mackiver's big business dinners, and everything was done admirably, and there was no waste, no extravagance.'

'The woman has a wonderful power of advertising her-

self,' Mary Mackiver says scornfully. 'Mother is not often taken in, but she is by this woman's bluntness; mother thinks it honesty.'

'I think nothing of the kind; at least, I know it's honesty, I'm not easy to deceive on that score. She's a widow, Dolly, is Mrs. Powles, and she'll come to you for what I consider very moderate wages,' Mrs. Mackiver urges. 'I should like you to have her for yourself by-and-by.'

'She's an excellent cook, of that I'm sure, because mother says so; think about her, Dolly dear, it's worth your while,' Captain Mackiver says; and his sister adds:

'Take my advice, Dolly, and have nothing to do with her; she has the fiercest eyes I ever saw in a woman's face, and if you take her up in this way, she will make you feel yourself responsible for her.'

'I wouldn't be that,' Dolly says decidedly, 'but there would be something very nice in having some one at Darragh who knew how things should be done.'

'If you start with a supposition that your Irish servants don't know how things should be done, you will soon get so wrong with them that all the Mrs. Powles in the world won't put you right,' Miss Mackiver says, with a certain grim air of pity for Dolly that is infectious.

'The sooner the servants who have been living at Darragh in idleness all this time go, the better for their master, I should say,' Mr. Mackiver puts in; 'and, as you can't do the housework yourself and put Miss Darragh Thynne to cook, I shall think you wise if *in this* you will be advised by us and take this woman whom my wife recommends with you.'

These words, 'I shall think you wise if *in this* you will be advised by us,' settle the question of the cook with Dolly. She has put all her energy into opposing the

Mackiver interest when it arrays itself against her brother. But she will show them that she is gracefully ready to bow her head to their yoke in all minor matters.

‘I shall ask you to secure her for—for me, or for Robert, which ought I to say?’ she says, appealing to Mrs. Mackiver, and the old lady mounts her household management hobby at once.

‘I shall engage her to be your servant; then, if Mrs. Annesley has any whims about not liking her, you can send her back here, and I’ll keep her till Ronald and you want her in your own house,’ Ronald’s mother says magnanimously; and to this course Dolly assents, glad to be able to please in this small matter, since she cannot give in to them in the more important one.

‘You don’t look happy, Ronald!’ she says to him by-and-by, when he has taken her away from the family group in the drawing-room, for a farewell chat in the morning-room, where there is no superfluity of adornment to distract their attention from one another. ‘Is it that you are vexed with me about—Robert?’

She clasps her pretty hands closely and tenderly round his arm and leans her chin upon his shoulder, looking up at him with her velvety brown eyes full of such perfect, unwavering love that he feels half guilty for having even admitted to himself that Darragh has dazzled him.

‘I am quite happy. If everything else in the world went wrong with me your love would always make me happy, dear!’

‘Then you are vexed with some one else about something. Will you tell me what it is? Will you trust my reason as fully as you do my love?’

‘I may as well out with it, Dolly dear; I am a little vexed at finding that your brother has led you to commit an im-

prudence, to use a mild term ; it will complicate my relations with him from the first ; your interests should have been sacred in his eyes, and he ought not to have tampered with your property till he felt certain that this wild scheme of his was going to succeed.'

Rouald speaks with that sort of austere moderation which is such a wearisome tone for a woman who has erred and offended unwillingly, and who is longing to make all fair amends, and be at perfect peace, to listen to.

'I wish my face had been my fortune, and that you had chosen me for that alone,' she says sadly ; and then he bursts forth into a vehement defence of his own sentiments regarding her, declaring that the thought of her money never entered his mind when he was learning to love her.

'Then dismiss all thoughts of it now, Ronald, if I'm really all you say I am to you ; and let us make up our minds not to be anxious about my money and Robert's affairs until we know that they are in a bad way ; you'll think differently of the place and all about it when you've seen it ; and you'll come and see it as soon as Robert and his wife come home, won't you ?'

'Yes ; will Miss Thynne be with you then ?' he asks, pulling his moustache thoughtfully.

'I think she will, but she's rather addicted to doing things abruptly without giving her friends due warning. Lady Killeen says her engagement seems to have taken them by surprise ; all the family would have said their persuasive say against it, I fancy, if she had let them know that she was really going to give herself to her cousin.'

'She's engaged, is she ? I'm glad of that ; who's the man ?' Ronald asks, and Dolly tells him.

'Her cousin, Mr. Arthur Thynne, the man that silly Mrs. St. John is pretending to regard as a hero and a patriot

now. Why are you glad she's engaged? Do you think she wants taming too?'

The question, asked in all innocence, reveals to him the fact that Dolly regards her own engagement as a taming process, whatever he may think about Miss Thynne's.

'I hope she won't alter,' Dolly goes on, pursuing her own line of thought; 'she is interesting beyond everything I ever met now: her enthusiasm never becomes gush, and her zeal and love for her country and her country-people is all real, there's no sham about it; when she speaks of their sufferings she suffers too, and when she is telling how full of poetry and pathos, of sensibility and fun and brave endurance they are, every one of the qualities she extols in them seems to take possession of herself. Mr. Thynne ought to be a great man, with such a wife as Darragh to urge him on.'

Dolly speaks with her whole heart, meaning every word she says with the intensity of meaning that is her chief characteristic. A flush that is partly caused by a feeling of pride in her, and partly by one of contrition for the delight he takes in her theme, rises to Captain Mackiver's brow, but when she ceases he only says:

'I, at any rate, ought to be a good man with such a noble-hearted girl as you for my wife; I'll gladly leave the greatness and the heroics to Mr. Arthur Thynne.'

CHAPTER X.

ALL FOR DOLLY.

'As Dolly insists on going, and you seem unable to combat her obstinate determination, I think it only fitting that one of us, you or I, Ronald, should escort her over and see her safely housed at this outlandish place.'

Mr. Mackiver is the speaker, and he makes this remark to Ronald on the occasion of the latter's last run up to town to see and take leave of his betrothed.

'I can't get leave,' Ronald says, rather curtly his father and mother think ; but his sister understands his motive and respects it.

'If you have a proper regard for Dolly you will persuade her to let your father go with her,' Mrs. Mackiver says. 'He is ready to put himself to the inconvenience and expense of the journey for her sake, and Dolly ought to accept his offer gladly.'

'She dislikes the idea of troubling my father, and she will not be alone ; Miss Thynne will be with her, and the treasure of a cook you have found for her can wait on them at the stations,' Ronald explains ; but his mother, who is bent on hearing her husband's unvarnished account of the state of things at Darragh, will not be satisfied.

'I think as your father is willing to go, both Dolly and you ought to jump at his offering to do so,' the old lady says severely. 'Miss Thynne may be all very well, but she's as pretty as Dolly herself, and in my young days it wouldn't have been thought right for two such girls to travel so far alone.'

'Mrs. Grundy wouldn't think it right for Ronald to be their escort, mother,' Mary puts in ; 'and as for their being "pretty," what difference will that make ? I believe that Dolly and Miss Thynne, beautiful as they are, will be quite as safe from rudeness and annoyance as I should be, and I'm plain enough.'

'I still think your father *ought* to go,' Mrs. Mackiver persists ; 'it would give a different impression to the people there at once if a man like Mr. Mackiver arrived with them ; as Dolly will go on a mad-geese chase, you ought to be

grateful to your father for wanting to put the best appearance on it.'

The two girls hear of this proposed self-sacrificial act on Mr. Mackiver's part with chagrin. Miss Thynne has come in to see Dolly, and come to some sort of definite arrangement about the probable length of her visit and the necessary quantity of luggage to be taken. They are discussing these matters with fervour and interest in the morning-room when Ronald comes in to them to moot his father's plan.

It is the first time that Darragh and Captain Mackiver have met since the Annesleys' wedding-day, and then they had scarcely spoken to one another. If Dolly were suspicious—which she is not—it would strike her as odd that Captain Mackiver should merely bend his head in cold salutation to Darragh now, instead of greeting the latter warmly and courteously, as it behoves her (Dolly's) lover to greet her friend.

'If Mr. Mackiver goes with us poor Darragh will be tried and found wanting every minute of the day; I can't stand that unless you're there to support me; will you come, Ronald?' Dolly says cheerfully; for though she professes to dread Mr. Mackiver's criticisms, she will bear them gladly if Ronald is with her.

'You will come, won't you?' the girl repeats, and Ronald turns to the fire and stirs it vehemently as he answers,

'It is impossible!'

'Why?' Darragh is the speaker, and as she speaks she comes up by his side, and places one exquisitely-booted, well-formed little foot on the fender to warm. He has always been in the habit of quoting Dolly's feet for size and symmetry, but this foot which stares him in the face now is unique.

His gaze travels rapidly from her foot to her eyes! Then

it is arrested, for she is waiting for his glance to meet hers, and Darragh is a woman who never waits in vain.

‘It is impossible!’ he repeats, with a poor pretence at being amused at the absurdity of such a thing being proposed.

‘But, why? I ask,’ Darragh says softly.

‘In the first place, I can’t get leave; and in the second place, I——’ He stops and gives another vigorous stir to the fire, and Darragh takes her foot from off the fender and her eyes away from his face, and turns back to the table, where Dolly is sitting writing out a list of things that have to be taken over to add to the comfort of the Irish home.

‘Let us be quite independent of these men and go by ourselves, Dolly, you and I alone,’ Darragh says, putting her hand on Dolly’s shoulder; ‘neither Mr. Mackiver nor his son would enjoy it in one way; Mrs. Mackiver would be too keenly alive to the danger.’

‘Danger!’ Dolly interrupts, putting down her pen and looking round quickly. Then, for the first time in her life, Dolly feels out of place, in the way almost, and perplexed about her relations with Ronald. For he is looking at Darragh in a half-angry, half-deprecating way, and Darragh is returning his look with one in which confusion and reproach are strongly blended.

‘Yes, danger; it’s not always as quiet there as in Russell Square,’ Darragh says hurriedly. ‘There may be a little fuss when the agent goes round, and fuss about the payment of money that is righteously due to the paid one would be a novelty to Mr. Mackiver.’

‘Fuss about the non-payment of rents would not be the worst dangers to be faced at Darragh,’ Captain Mackiver says slowly. ‘I think, Dolly, I should be a wise man if I not only refused to go myself, but asked you to stay here with me.’

‘Perhaps you would be “wise,” but not “brave,”’ Darragh says; and Dolly exclaims:

‘Ronald, you’re only pretending! I know so well how you’d not only face danger, but court it.’

‘I swear I haven’t courted *this*!’ Ronald interrupts; and his words seem to be addressed to Darragh, and not to Dolly.

“‘This!’ Why, my dear Ronald, there isn’t any yet, and if there were you wouldn’t let us face it alone. Do consider it settled that, if your father goes, you go too. He would break my heart if he found much fault with everything, if he had me there alone.’

Dolly is not pleading importunately, but she is putting her case with all her power of words and looks before Ronald. He is ‘her own,’ the one man in the world who belongs to her, and to whom she belongs; and she does not scruple to let her claim to him make itself manifest before this other girl.

‘Dear Ronald, do consider it settled that you go, if you can get leave. I must go. Will you let me go without you?’

‘Shall I?’ he asks carelessly, turning to Darragh.

‘If I were in your place, and Dolly wished it, I should go,’ Miss Thynne replies, busying herself with her wraps and preparing to depart. A sense of chill has come over Darragh, causing her to draw her fur wrap closer around her, and to make her long to get into the brighter outside air. Cheerful as the blaze is which comes from the fire which Captain Mackiver has been so assiduously stirring, it fails to warm the girl, who has just discovered that an even fiercer fire is burning in the heart of the man; Darragh uses no shallow sophistries to herself on the subject.

‘He has fallen in love with me against his will,’ she

thinks, 'and he is engaged to this gem of a girl who is ready to lay down her life for him.' The complication is an awful one to Miss Thynne ! His love for herself is a trifle that she can put aside lightly enough ; it does not flatter or appeal to her in any way. But his perfidy to Dolly—unspoken, unacknowledged as it is even !—how can that be put aside and forgotten ?

'I shall always know he's not worthy of her. Even if they marry and have a dozen children, and he makes the best of husbands and fathers, I shall always remember that he would have been false to her if I had been willing to let him. Dolly deserves a stauncher man than this ; but it wouldn't make her a bit the happier to know it,' Darragh thinks, as she prepares to get herself away, after delivering herself of that remark relative to what she should do were she in Captain Mackiver's place.

'If you say that, I shall go,' Ronald says.

'What influence you have over him, you see, Darragh !' Dolly laughs. 'Ronald, don't look glum, as if you were going into banishment. We will have a glorious time over there ; Mr. Thynne will be in Galway, and——'

'What nonsense we're talking,' Ronald interrupts. 'I tell you, Dolly, I can't get leave. You're the dearest little girl in the world, but the chief won't consider your claims before the regiment's.'

'We must do without you, I see that,' Darragh says, venturing to smile at him now that she thinks he is not coming.

'You will have Mr. Thynne to cater for your amusements then, and my father to see you safely over. What more can you want ?' Captain Mackiver says discontentedly. He feels that he has betrayed himself to Darragh ; and, worse still, he feels that Darragh is despising him.

‘To think of that girl being my wife’s friend, and nothing more to me all my life—and I could worship her!’ the young man thinks, as he looks at the slender, graceful form draped in a long velvet Mother Hubbard cloak, deeply trimmed with fur, which is making for the door.

Then Dolly’s voice rouses him from his half-reverie.

‘Ronald, go with Miss Thynne; the snow is falling so thickly, I’m afraid she will have a difficulty about a cab.’

‘I am at Miss Thynne’s service,’ he says stiffly, and Darragh, unless she would be discourteous, has no choice but to let him come.

The snow is falling thick and fast, and is driven into their faces at all corners by an easterly wind that has a blasting force in its flying wings. Overhead all is thick, veiled, impenetrable, and underfoot, the cold, pure, white cruel shroud of snow is rapidly enveloping all things. They have a fair excuse for silence, and both are glad of it.

But as they turn into Oxford Street and shelter in a shop doorway till a cab can be hailed, Darragh says :

‘Dolly and I will have a rough time of it to-night.’

‘If this goes on you mustn’t think of crossing,’ he says, with a shudder that may be caused by the cold.

‘Indeed, but we shall; Dolly’s on guard over her brother’s interests now, and she has told me how essential it is those interests should be well protected; now I happen to know that though the servants left at Darragh by Killeen are very nice in their way, economy and regard for their new master’s pocket are not the rocks on which they split.’

‘Here’s a cab; if you insist on crossing to-night I shall go with you,’ he cries, as he hands her in, and she bends her head and says :

‘Thank you in Dolly’s name for offering to brave the danger with her; but how about your leave?’

‘If you think I ought to get it, I will get it,’ he says, and though he would give much to be able to say it in tones that he would use in idle courtesy to any other woman, he cannot help infusing far too much earnestness into his words for them to sound well in Darragh’s ears.

‘If I told you all I thought, you would probably be so much offended with me that you would advise Dolly to drop my acquaintance; I don’t want that calamity to come to pass, therefore I will only say do what you think Dolly will like best.’ Then she drives off, and he goes back to Dolly.

She has forgotten the feeling of being in the way and perplexed which possessed her just now when she turned round suddenly to see Ronald’s curious look at Darragh Thynne, but she has not forgotten the circumstance that caused it. The idea that Ronald does not like this girl whom she is hoping to win for her best and closest female friend in that married future which is before them both, is disappointing and distressing to her, and so it is with almost a reproachful cadence that she says:

‘Ronald, I wish you could feel differently about Darragh Thynne!’

‘Good Heavens! do *you* see?’ his guilty conscience pricks him into exclaiming; then, fortunately for Dolly’s peace of mind, prudence arrests the flow of his words, and forces him to reflect.

After all, Dolly knows nothing, fears nothing, suspects nothing!

‘You startled me, my own,’ he resumes cheerfully; ‘for a moment I fancied you thought I had been churlish or uncivil to the important Miss Thynne, and in that case I should be surely called to fierce account for my misdeemeanour by her fire-eating lover.’

‘No, you were not “churlish”; you couldn’t be that to

a lady, but you were not gracious.' Then Mary comes into the room, and Dolly puts her in possession of the heads of her case, and asks the sister who knows the truth if 'it isn't odd that Ronald should rather seem to dislike the idea of having Miss Thynne's society.'

'He looked at her, and seemed to challenge her to wish him to go with us, against his inclination,' Dolly says half-complainingly.

'Go with you! are you all gone mad together?' Miss Mackiver replies, with supreme contempt; 'there's my father talking of going with you, and staying with you, without a thought of whether Robert Annesley will like to find a household established there on his return.'

'Robert is always glad to see any of you, you know he always has been,' poor Dolly says, fighting bravely against her own conviction of things being very different now Robert is married. Besides, Dolly, is suffering from a qualm or two about the matter of expense. She does not know that Mr. Mackiver means to pay the bills at Darragh while he stays there, and that his wife has acquiesced in this extra expense because it will enable her to see when she overhauls these bills whether or not Dolly is an 'economical housekeeper,' and if Irish servants waste or use more than English ones.

'I've my doubts about Dolly's knowing where to pare, and she's shamefully ignorant of the use of scales and weights; laughs at the idea of weighing every ounce of meat as it enters the house,' Ronald's mother says to him when, just before they are starting for the train this evening, she is giving him to understand that as his father will provide the funds he need have no scruples about staying at Darragh.

'Dolly won't like that when she comes to know it,' the son replies; 'we ought to tell her.'

‘Dolly won’t know it till she gets there, and then she will have no choice in the matter : your father is a man to have his own way, Ronald, when he thinks his way right,’ Mrs. Mackiver says decisively, and Ronald, who is not sure of how his betrothed stands with respect to ready money, gives up the argument against his father’s intention.

‘But it’s like buying the right to interfere and find fault with the household arrangements,’ he grumbles, ‘and you see if it doesn’t make a row with the servants.’

‘Not at all ; it will only be as if the house were lent to him, or he were renting it,’ Mrs. Mackiver says.

‘Then Dolly will be his guest instead of he Dolly’s?’

‘Exactly ; Dolly and that Miss Thynne, who’s going for no reason that I can see, will be your father’s visitors, and there’s an end of it, Ronald ; it’s none of our doing that Dolly goes at all, but, as she will go, we’re doing our best for her, and for you.’

And Ronald is obliged to seem to think his mother as absolutely right as she thinks herself. But all the while he knows that Dolly will not think likewise, and fears there may be a division in that Darragh camp to which, against his own sense of rectitude, he is going with the rest.

‘I’ll get *Punch*, and all the rest of the weekly papers, to beguile the journey with,’ he says by-and-by, when they are all standing on the platform waiting for the porter to give the parting admonition to jump in, which signifies that the train is really about to start.

‘I never want literature to help beguile the time away when I can see ; all this snow makes it as light as day. What a cold, lovely journey we shall have.’

‘I wish we were over,’ Darragh whispers, as Ronald and his sister move away to the bookstall ; ‘to be snowed up on

the line wouldn't be pleasant, with your father-in-law that is to be for our sole companion.'

'Ronald's going too: didn't he tell you?' Dolly says, in surprise, for, though Darragh has only just met them at the station, Dolly takes it for granted that Captain Mackiver's movements are of sufficient importance to be known to the whole party.

'How about his leave?' Darragh asks.

'Telegraphed for it and got it, dear cld boy,' Dolly replies; then, seeing her friend's face still clouded, she hastily adds:

'Dear Darragh, I wish with all my heart that Mr. Thynne were coming with us; it would make it perfect if he were.'

'With all my heart, I'm glad *he's not here*,' Darragh says quickly. 'We shall have enough of these men by-and-by, Dolly; why couldn't you and I have been left to ourselves now?'

'She'll get to understand Ronald, and like him better soon, I hope,' Dolly says to herself, and then she recalls to her memory safe examples of how her father and some of her mother's lady friends had been antagonistic to one another. 'But they were old, and ugly, and interfering,' the girl reminds herself: 'Darragh is neither; but men are so hard to please!'

Meanwhile Ronald and his sister Mary have walked away to the bookstall, where he begins impatiently turning over books and papers, asking her opinion, and talking to the man at the stall, with the obvious intention of preventing her from speaking on the subject which is nearest to the minds of both.

But it is no use! In reply to his repeated requests that she will advise him as to this and that book or paper, Mary only says:

‘I’ll give you a text to think of on the long journey you’re going : “Let him who thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”’

CHAPTER XI.

SHADOWS OF TURNING.

BUT the run from London to Chester is a slow one this evening, in consequence of the snow wreathing in several places on the line, and checking the progress of the train. But not until they arrive at the quaint old city on the river Dee do they realise the force with which the storm is raging. But at Chester they are perceptibly conscious of the iron rule of winter being established. At Chester they hear rumours of stoppages on the line to Holyhead being inevitable on account of the enormous snowdrifts, which are being piled up higher and higher each hour. So Mr. Mack-iver, sorely against the wishes of the two girls, who are anxious to push on to their bourne, rules that they remain there for the night at least, possibly for the next day also.

‘It’s not too late for a walk ; do let us go and look at the Rows,’ Dolly says to Ronald, as they stand on the platform, while their luggage is being collected and wheeled off to the Queen’s Hotel close by.

‘You and I by ourselves ? Yes, my dearest,’ Ronald says, trying to portray unmitigated delight in the scheme, and failing by reason of the struggle that is going on in his mind. The journey has fatigued Darragh unaccountably. Her vitality is lowered, and her sole desire seems to be to get to rest. For the first time since he put her into the cab this morning he addresses her directly.

‘You seem cold and over-tired, Miss Thynne; won’t you like Dolly to stay with you instead of going for a walk?’

‘Yes, let me! how selfish to think of leaving you!’ Dolly cries, but Darragh rejects the offer of Dolly’s companionship even as Mr. Mackiver is saying:

‘I shall not think of permitting any of you young people to go strolling about the town to-night; come quietly in and get to bed early, and be thankful we’re not buried under the snow till the morning.’

‘I couldn’t go in quietly and rest and go to bed—unless Darragh will let me stay with her,’ Dolly says. ‘Mr. Mackiver, you’ll be wasting one of the best opportunities of my life if you don’t let me go and look at the river from the walls, and at the arcade to-night.’

‘You can spend a profitable hour in walking round the place to-morrow,’ Mr. Mackiver says; ‘this is no night for a delicate young lady to be out, and I wonder at Ronald for asking you.’

‘Eh! what’s that?’ Ronald asks absently. He has not been taking any interest in the discussion; his thoughts, in truth, have been with Darragh, who has drawn herself away from them.

‘You shouldn’t want to drag Dolly round this place to-night; we will go in and have some mulled wine.’

They are in the hotel by this time, and Mr. Mackiver begins ordering rooms and refreshments at once. But Dolly is determined to have her own way in this matter. There is nothing unreasonable in her desire to see the picturesque old city under an aspect that it may not again wear while she lives to see it. Her love of nature and novelty is perfectly healthy and in the order of things; therefore she says resolutely, even though she sees Ronald taking off his coat:

‘I mean to have a look at Chester under a white veil by moonlight. If you will come, Ronald, I shall be glad ; if not, I’ll go alone.’

Captain Mackiver is sick at heart, and savage with himself for being so. Moreover, he is distraught by the change in Darragh. Where are her bursts of enthusiasm? where her fits of merriment? where the quick transitions from gay to grave that puzzled and pleased, that won him first? They are not belonging to this Darragh who is with them now. This is a depressed, silent girl, indifferent to all things in what looks like a dully selfish way. ‘Is it possible’—Ronald’s face flushes as he asks himself this question—‘is it possible that she has fathomed his secret, and is frightened to find that she returns his love?’

He recoils from the thought of his own perfidy, his frailty, his fickleness and falsehood, as this question arises in his mind ; but he knows that he is guilty, and that his guilt is clinging closely to and is dear to him. He would give all he has in the world to feel the throb and thrill, the pleasure and the pain of a real heart-outbreak for Dolly. And any man on earth ought to feel it for her. He is thinking this as Dolly says, ‘If you will come with me, Ronald, I shall be glad ; if not, I’ll go alone.’

He is so dazed by his own defalcation from that rigid path of rectitude and honour from which he has hitherto felt it to be impossible that he, as ‘officer and gentleman,’ could swerve, that he scarcely takes in the gist of Dolly’s speech at first. When he does rouse himself from his apathy, and avow himself ready to attend that charming seal-skinned figure in its progress through the snowdrifts, Darragh has cast off her apathy, and is saying :

‘Let us go out alone, Dolly, you and I, without any one else ; I’ve been backwards and forwards so many times that

I shall be a much better guide for you than Captain Mackiver.'

But Captain Mackiver is on the alert now, and will not permit them on any account to go alone. So they muffle themselves up in their golden-brown seal-skin coats, and Dolly puts on a little fur turban, and Darragh a slouching felt hat that would make any other woman look top-heavy, and they go out, the three of them, in the wild white thing through the streets of Chester.

Dolly is an ardent sight-seer. She is, moreover, in perfect health, and full of sounding vitality; additionally she is not heart-sore about anything or any one, for her trust in Captain Mackiver is full and perfect, and so is her confident belief that all will come right for her brother and his belongings. Accordingly, after the manner of healthy young womanhood when it is heart-happy and conscience-free, she is rapid and energetic in motion, and full of eager interest in everything. The other two seem to experience a difficulty in keeping up with her as she leads the way, or seems to lead the way, through the quaint streets and under the solemn, picturesque arcades. Darragh is in a flat mood, her voice is seldom heard in reply to the rapturous remarks of her friend Dolly, and her feet move as if they were tired or weighted. As for Captain Mackiver, he is depressed by the consciousness of being utterly unworthy of the frank trust which Dolly is reposing in him—letting him lag behind with Darragh, for instance, and giving him as many opportunities as he chooses to take of conversing with Miss Thynne.

This wild, adventurous walk is stimulating to a degree to Dolly; and when they come out on the walls and look upon the glistening, freezing surface of the Dee, her delight knows no bounds.

'It purifies and ennobles us to come face to face with nature in such a mood as this. We feel how little we are, and how powerless, and how easily we might be swept away from the face of the earth, or buried alive in it under the cruel, beautiful snow, and how it is only God's goodness and mercy that keep us from harm,' the girl says, as they retrace their steps at last, and she turns to give one farewell glance to the wild, wintry scene they are leaving.

'And you are so pure and noble already, my darling,' Ronald whispers humbly; and Darragh catches hold of Dolly's arm abruptly, and clings to it.

'I wish I felt as you do, Dolly,' she mutters.

'My father was right: it has not done us any good coming for a prowl to-night,' Ronald says, as after a lengthened silence they come back to the Queen's Hotel.

'Answer for yourself, Ronald; I feel all my sight-seeing blood up for anything,' Dolly says; and then she falls to praising Albert Smith for (among other things) having had such a perfect appreciation of the 'rare old city of Chester.'

'Did Albert Smith ever write anything so serious as a dissertation on the beauties and merits of any place?' Darragh asks. 'I thought that his reputation rested on those funny little natural histories of "The Snob," and "The Gent," and "The Ballet Girl."'

'That shows you have never read your "Christopher Tadpole,"' Dolly laughs. 'There is a description of Chester in it that would warm and rouse you, Darragh, cold and tired as you are. You shall read it to-night; I have the book in my trunk.'

'Thanks; but I think I've seen and heard enough of Chester to last the term of my life,' Darragh says, as they come into the warm, glowing room, where Mr. Mackiver is sipping hot negus, and lamenting over the obdurate natures of the

young people for whom he is making himself temporarily responsible. 'I never wish to see the place again ; once I find myself in Ireland I hope never to cross the Channel again.'

The girl speaks in a passionate, overstrung, heart-aching way that is perplexing to two of her hearers. But Captain Mackiver understands something of what is passing in Miss Thynne's mind, and his partial comprehension makes him more sad for her and more savage with himself than he has ever been before in the whole course of his life.

His 'partial' comprehension, be it remarked, for it is only partial. The complex workings of Darragh's heart and honour, her soul and taste and conscience, are mysterious even to herself ; to others they must be absolutely inscrutable. She has tried to feel rightly about this revelation which Captain Mackiver has made of his sentiments concerning her, and she finds that she cannot judge him as rigorously, blame him as sternly, and find him as guilty as she ought to do. He is honour-plighted to a girl whose probity and integrity will be a lasting reproach to Darragh if she lets him become aware that she has understood and condoned his offence in letting his heart wander towards her. The strong, susceptible nature of the Irish girl has been deeply swayed more than once this day, and, to her own horror, she fears that it has been swayed by him and towards him. All the way down in the train, and all through the melancholy walk which she has taken with him, though not of them, through the streets of Chester, she has been tortured by this reflection—that by merely being friendly with him in a polite and ordinary way she is being disloyal to Dolly. And now another thought obtrudes itself and worries her afresh—the thought of Arthur, of that buoyant and irresponsible cousin of hers, whose political and patriotic ardour she has fanned so sedu-

lously from his early boyish days, when she first taught him to love herself and long to serve her country.

The truth forces itself upon her now. She is not in love with her cousin Arthur. She merely regards him as a valuable aid, a useful instrument in hands which long to restore the fortunes of Ireland. To her own shame and contrition she acknowledges to herself that if Ronald Mackiver had the same amount of enthusiasm, and developed it in a more efficacious way than Arthur, she would prefer the young soldier to the young pressman. Then she takes herself to task for using such a word as 'prefer,' and for thinking such a thought, and altogether passes a turbulent time of it with her own feelings.

'I wish I had never heard of one of the Mackiver tribe,' she thinks. 'I know how it will be ; the old man will madden me when we get home' (she still thinks of Darragh as 'home') 'by finding fault, and carping at existing arrangements. And I shall forget that the servants are Mr. Annesley's servants now, and shall feel furious for them when they've complained about this horrid English cook, and condemned by old Mr. Mackiver ; and then I shall go to Ronald for sympathy instead of to Dolly, because a man's sympathy is more congenial to me than a woman's ; it's bolder, it doesn't potter about trying to find out first whether or not the cause is good and safe, and warranted to leave its supporters in a blameless position if it fails ; and then he, in his wretched, wicked weakness, will be touched by my turning to him, and everything will be altogether wrong.'

A dozen times during the long hours of the night do these thoughts assail and trouble Darragh, and more than twice or thrice does she declare that she will crush out all foolish pride and go back on the morrow to her cousin, Lord Killeen's, house, and give them to understand that she has

found reasons to alter her mind about going to Ireland with Miss Annesley. Then the thought of Lady Killeen intervenes and checks her—Lady Killeen, with her maddeningly moral and correct taunting ways, and her irreproachable habit of making Darragh feel unhappy, and appear to be in the wrong in her cousin's eyes.

‘No; I’ll risk a good deal rather than go back with a sense of failure about me and face her oppressive ladyship,’ the girl says wearily. Then she falls asleep, and after the manner of illogical humanity she does not dream of one of these troubles which have been disturbing her, but has dazzling visions of an exquisite bay mare which is waiting saddled and bridled for her, and which she cannot ever *quite* mount. Sometimes her hand is on the pommel and her foot in a groom’s hand ready for the spring, when the mare slips away, or the skirt of her habit suddenly increases in weight so that she is dragged to the ground, or the groom changes into a fierce dog who is ready to spring at her throat if she moves. Altogether, it is no wonder that she rises the next morning pallid and weary and restless, after a night of such conflicting emotions and disturbing reflections.

With all her strength she does pray to be given grace and strength to conduct herself in such a way as shall avert all suspicion from his wavering mind of the too kindly feelings which she entertains towards him. It is not a pleasant task for a woman to undertake to teach a man who is kindly disposed towards her, to regard her as a harsh and repellent, unsympathetic, and iron-clad person, with whom he had better not have anything to do. But upon this task Darragh enters with all her power when she goes down and begins the business of this day of their lives at Chester.

Rumours are flying about the hotel of stoppages on the line near Holyhead, but these Mr. Mackiver, who has had

quite enough of hotel expenses by mid-day, disregards. If Ronald were in his normally reasonable and considerate condition of mind he would institute inquiries, scent danger from afar, and take all proper and wise precautions to avert it. But as it is he is feverish, alternately moody and excitable in a way that makes Dolly wish with all her heart that she had not urged him to come with them.

She does not say to Ronald that he is fidgety and so very tiresome to deal with, as fidgetiness has no part in her composition, but she shows good-natured toleration for his infirmities, and pities him from her standpoint of satisfaction with the existing order of things, for finding his share of the burden laid upon them greater than he can bear.

‘Poor dear boy! I suppose it’s his liver,’ Dolly says apologetically to Miss Thynne, whom she (Dolly) fancies must be much amazed at Ronald’s crankiness.

‘Men shouldn’t have livers,’ Darragh replies scornfully. ‘Really one would think the delay and the doubt pressed more heavily on the gallant young soldier than it does on his old father, or on us girls.’

‘Yes,’ Dolly says happily; ‘that’s the way with liver. I’ve seen Robert quite cross two or three times; never cross with anybody, you know, but cross in the air at large; and afterwards he has told me it was all liver.’

‘Your brother and you are very fond of one another?’

‘I’d do anything in the world for Robert; it seems nonsense saying that, for a girl can do so little for a man, after all, and he has a wife now to do that little for him. But I think you understand me? My brother, and his success, and all that he has done, and can do, and may do, are dearer to me than any career of my own could ever be, even if I could have a brilliant one cut out for me. Haven’t you ever felt that for any one?’

‘Indeed, I haven’t, Dolly,’ Darragh says with emphasis ; ‘and it strikes me that you ought to be feeling it for Captain Mackiver now.’

Dolly shakes her head. ‘My pride in him and love for him are always satisfied,’ she says. ‘Ronald is such a firm, true man, there’s no variation or shadow of turning about him. You see one can’t feel loving anxiety perpetually that a person should do when you’re as sure as you can be of anything in this world that that person can never do wrong.’

‘No variation or shadow of turning,’ Darragh repeats absently. ‘That’s a fine character to give a man ; I should fear to give it to any one for fear of having to take it away—for fear of the man’s tarnishing it, or being careless about it and letting others dim it for him.’

‘You are fond of raising bogies.’

‘No, I’m not ; the difficulty I’m raising now is a real flesh and blood one,’ Darragh says, shaking her head sagely, and looking into the corner with as fixed and earnest a gaze as if the ‘difficulty’ were there visible to her.

‘Poor girl !’ Dolly thinks ; ‘she’s fearing already that Mr. Thynne’s volatile nature will lead him astray. It must be hard to feel that. Poor Darragh ! she deserves a second Ronald—only I don’t think there’s one to be found,’ the girl adds proudly. ‘My own, true, firm Ronald !’

‘If you young people will be ready in half-an-hour we shall get a capital train on to Holyhead,’ Mr. Mackiver comes in telling them ; and they are obliged to cast conjectural difficulties behind them, and go to work to meet some that are imminent.

It is a work of time to collect all the furs and wraps and rugs, the books and leather bags and straps, and all the paraphernalia of travelling ; it is even a longer work to

collect Mrs. Powles, to calm her fears, which have been considerably roused by rumours of the stoppages on the line, and to lead her to assume an air of willingness.

‘Such weather I’ve never known in all my born days,’ she says; and then she adds majestically, ‘But there! I’ve always lived in the best of families, and it’s only my health which have brought me to this.’

Broadly speaking, the treasure is already a nuisance, and not an amusing one on a cold day, with the prospect of a long journey in her company before them. But Dolly makes the best of Mrs. Powles, though she never wanted her, and cheers that discontented woman’s soul by painting bright word-pictures of the sunny aspect all nature will wear as soon as they cross the St. George’s Channel.

CHAPTER XII.

TOO COLD AND TOO WARM.

SORELY against the will of the young people, who dislike the fuss of it, and declare that they shall be on board the steamer at Holyhead, when they can banquet sumptuously if they like, before they are hungry, Mr. Mackiver insists on taking a small hamper of provisions away with him. The hardy old Scot understands the weather-signals better than do those who are with him, and he has an idea that if they linger on the line they will regard one another more kindly if a small hamper is between them than if they have nothing to do but contemplate the immensities of nature through a blinding veil of snow from the carriage-windows.

Dolly is the only one who faces the prospect of the journey with genuine pleasure. Darragh dreads the enforced

intercourse with Captain Mackiver that must ensue, and Captain Mackiver, fancying that he has made himself contemptible in her eyes, dreads it too. As for Mrs. Powles, the cook, she gives every one to understand that while she lived in the 'best of families where wages was no object, and mean ways unknown,' such a calamity as this wintry weather never came to pass.

It is a ghastly day for travelling, there is no doubt of that. A blasting east wind is sweeping with bitter energy into every nook and corner of the land, and at the same time the snow falls thick, like powder, and almost freezes as it falls. For some miles the progress the train makes is slow by comparison with its ordinary speed only. Then it begins perceptibly to drag and labour, then it halts, jerks forward with immense effort, and, finally, comes to a standstill about three miles from Holyhead in a huge unimpressible snowdrift that looks as if it would take several months of moderate English fine weather to melt it.

They cannot get out and walk the rest of the distance, as they would gladly do, for the snow presses in a hard, compact mass, nearly up to the carriage-windows on either side. The cold increases in exact proportion as their hopes of a speedy release go down, and as they have exhausted the newspapers which they got at Chester, there is nothing for them to do but to make themselves as agreeable to one another as they can under circumstances that would take the fascination out of such queens of society even as have been depicted in 'Endymion.'

It is very hard on them all, but especially is this temporary incarceration together hard upon the two who feel that it would be much more expedient that they should be apart. Unfortunately, extreme cold is not unbecoming to Darragh. If her nose looked red and her cheeks purple, Captain

Mackiver would find the temptation to look at her far less strong than he does.

But Darragh, in a long seal-skin with beaver collar and cuffs, a ruby-plush bonnet, with a soft mass of gossamer tied round her throat and chin, is quite as lovely as Darragh in the draperies of summer, with the soft fervent beauty of sun and sultriness in her face. Dolly wears a long seal-skin jacket too, and looks very pretty in it, but she lacks the becoming beaver round the throat, and substituting a knitted Shetland shawl for the sake of warmth, she gives herself a huddled-up appearance which does not commend itself to the taste of man so readily.

There are only two other occupants of the carriage beside themselves. One is an elderly clergyman returning to his charge in a parish in Wicklow after a brief period of peace in England, and the other is a Dublin milliner, who feels that there must be a Jonah in the train, since it is delayed with her precious freight of bonnets and mantles. These, wrapt in their own special sources of disquiet, offer no encouragement to outsiders to address them, and so, as the time goes on, and they are not dug out, Darragh and Ronald Mackiver find themselves driven to speak to one another.

For Dolly, worn out with anxiety, cold, and fatigue, has succumbed to Nature's soft restorer, and is fast asleep, with her head on a pile of rugs, and her feet propped up by Ronald's travelling-case; and Mr. Mackiver is enduring some of the agonies that will overtake people who are always trying to estimate accurately what everything seen and unforeseen will cost them.

'Don't you wish you had never heard of Darragh?' Miss Thynne says at last to her only wide-awake companion. 'Just imagine being snowed up with the possibility before

you of dying like a frozen-in rabbit in its hole ! How you must feel it !

‘The same possibilities are before us all, and as Dolly is in such a strait I’m glad I’m with her,’ he says, looking with tenderness, that strikes Darragh as being rather elaborate, at the recumbent figure of the sleeping Dolly. Then it strikes him that her feet must be rather cold, and he is about to cover them up with his fur rug when Darragh remarks :

‘Among other things, Dolly Annesley has the prettiest feet I ever saw in my life. What a favourite she’ll be very soon over there. It’s a pity she’s not Robert Annesley’s wife instead of his sister.’

‘With all due respect for your opinion, I can’t think that a pity, as she is going to be my wife,’ Ronald says ; and Darragh gives him a bright smile by way of encouraging him to continue the conversation in this safe strain.

‘No ; of course you think yourself the only man worthy of her, and imagine she’ll have a higher destiny as your wife than she would have in making black white for the poor people about Darragh. Well ! I don’t know ; I think the Irish risk would be the least to run ; but then I’m a Darragh girl.’

‘It’s cruel of you to think so hardly of me,’ he mutters.

‘Is it ! Cruel to whom ? Would you have me sit here, where I may be frozen to death in a few hours, and perjure myself to the extent of pretending to think that you are *the* perfect man who may make that really perfect woman happy ? No ! no ! no ! I’ll not call down such a judgment on myself.’

‘Miss Thynne, you can’t despise me for being merely a faulty, erring man, more than I do myself.’

‘Can’t I !’ she says witheringly. ‘Why, you don’t know *half* ; you don’t understand how, in thinking less of you, I

have come to have such contempt for myself; and all the while I like you, and know how you are striving, and going to be honourable and what you ought to be. And there's Arthur for me to think of as well—Arthur, who would form himself into a projectile, and be fired by the Home Rule party into the face of all English law and order, if I told him to do it.'

She warms to her own words, and the Irish Protestant clergyman in the corner, hearing them, looks upon this snowed-up rebel for the first time wittingly, and sees that she is passing fair.

'Such words as yours,' he says courteously, 'may be uttered with impunity in such a pass as this; but they may become a real fiery torch if you give vent to them in the land we are going to.'

'If they are, be sure I'll put a light to them when we get there,' she says eagerly, glad that this other man has come into the discussion, which is rapidly becoming too personal between Ronald and herself.

'And the light may become a devastating flame which all your after efforts may be powerless to quell,' the stranger goes on gravely; and then Darragh, recognizing in him an Orangeman and loyalist, turns her whole energies upon him for the next hour, hoping to convert him to her view of the case, since she is the only side of it in his view for the time.

By-and-by, when weary hours have passed and the contents of the providently supplied hamper have long been exhausted, relief comes to them in the shape of workmen, who let down a light repast of sandwiches, hot cocoa, and rolls from the top of the carriage. Then with one accord they think of Mrs. Powles, who has been enduring these things without society or food, and they send a special deputation, consisting of a guard and a porter, to her with words of com-

fort, a cup of cocoa, sandwiches, and the prospect of a speedy release.

Under the influence of the glow of feeling caused by renewed hope and sustaining food, the little party who are being personally conducted by Mr. Mackiver wake up, and are as one man over the basket of provisions and the promise of soon being dragged on into Holyhead. Dolly, renovated by her sleep and serenely secure in her relations with Ronald, wakes up to the current position of affairs with an air of brilliant satisfaction that is rather trying to Darragh to witness. For Darragh has had no sleep, and is not serenely secure about anything.

The clergyman, Ronald, and Miss Thynne having argued the question of the Land League, Griffith's Valuation, the three F's, and other things over, very much to their own individual satisfaction, a complication arises between the three just as the train moves slowly on and presently deposits them in safety on the pier.

'If I could talk to you for six months I should convince you that my side is the right, and gain you as one of our warmest and strongest adherents,' the clergyman says to Darragh, and she replies :

'If the man I'm going to marry ratted from principle and tried to argue me into following him, I'm sure I should break my vows of duty and obedience to him, and cling to the side I've *known* to be right all my life.'

'You must teach this young lady a different and better political creed,' the clergyman says smilingly, as he gathers up his travelling belongings and prepares to jump out of the train. 'We shall have a rough crossing, otherwise I should beg you to keep her on deck that I might tell her some tales of the land she loves so well that would induce her to alter her views as to what is best for it.'

‘I—you mistake—’ Ronald is beginning in confusion, but Darragh is equal to the occasion.

‘Oh! *this* is not the man I’m going to marry: the man for whom that happiness is in store wouldn’t have let you say half that you have been saying, unmolested; he and I would both have been upon you with refutations and convincing arguments and enthusiastic denunciations of all coercive measures that would have overwhelmed you and brought you over to us, humbled, but grateful for having been shown the right way at last; *this* gentleman admits himself to be my born foe and would-be enslaver.’

‘Has she a double meaning in speaking these idle words?’ Ronald finds himself wondering as he guides Dolly’s pretty, beautifully-shod feet along the slippery way to the steamer, and even as he wonders thus Dolly says—

‘Darragh will keep Mr. Thynne up to the mark she has made for him to aim at, won’t she? Which is she most in love with, do you think—Arthur Thynne, or her own ideas of Ireland’s future to be worked out by him? I wonder if you were in love with her if you would go head over heels into “the cause,” as she calls it, as he is doing at her bidding?’

‘Being in love with you, I don’t feel called upon to go into that question,’ said Captain Mackiver. And then they get on board, and the two young ladies select their berths, while Mrs. Powles declares her intention of perishing on deck rather than facing the unknown in the cabin.

‘It’s what I’ve never been accustomed to, sir,’ she says reproachfully to Mr. Mackiver. ‘When I put in my advertisement “no objection to travel,” I little thought that I was to be treated like a Polar bear for hours, and then expected to go down below among a mongering lot, all of them on empty stomachs like myself; so, thanking you all the same,

I shall stay on deck. It's always been given in to me that I know my work and my place, none better ; and *my* place isn't down there among them poor groaning things that turn sick at sight of a wave.'

'I hope, as you've had such experience, that you will soon reduce what I fear we shall find to be an ill-regulated establishment into good working order,' Mr. Mackiver says anxiously. He is beginning to be a little afraid of Mrs. Powles, who has a martial mien after supper, and who is evidently inclined to consider them all as so much indebted to her already, that she may make what terms she pleases with them for the future.

'I hope I shall,' she says, straightening her back, and clenching her teeth in anticipation of the genial task. 'If I don't soon make them lazy, idle, cheating, good-for-nothing Irish servants wish they'd never been born before I came among them I'm mistaken. I know what work is, and I'll see that every servant in a house as is under me does the work ; and if they don't, me and them soon fall out ; and when we do, it isn't *I* that give in, Mr. Mackiver.'

'I'm sure of that, quite satisfied on that point,' he says drily, 'but I'll just mention to you that an obstinate assertion of her own rights is not the greatest or only merit a servant has in my eyes ; I should commend *moderation* in many things to your notice, Mrs. Powles, moderation, and a less vainglorious spirit.'

Mrs. Powles is silent under this rebuke ; but, as soon as he is out of hearing, she revenges herself by murmuring to the elements that she is thankful that 'meddling dried-up old mollycoddle is not going to be her master.' She makes up her mind that as soon as she gets to their bourne, and is settled, and has proved beyond dispute that she is essential to the well-being of the establishment, she

will acknowledge no rule but Miss Annesley's, and herself instruct Miss Annesley as to what that rule shall be. After the manner of her class, the admirable English cook falls into the error of supposing that because Dolly is light-hearted, gracious-mannered, and non-exacting, therefore she is incapable of holding the reins, and compelling the household horses to obey them. But this is an error that will be rectified the first time Miss Annesley's sense of right is roused into opposition and assertion by wrong-headedness or assumption on the part of the white elephant who has been forced upon her by the Mackivers.

There is no dallying on the line between Dublin and Galway. To Darragh's delight they reach the home in which she was born, the house to which she comes as a guest now, by daylight, and even she is satisfied with the way in which Captain Mackiver bestows hearty encomiums on the beauties and possibilities of the demesne, unkempt and uncared-for as it looks now.

'I never saw gates off their hinges on any land that was worth half its purchase-money,' Mr. Mackiver says severely, as they pass through the last dilapidated iron gateway, and drive to the entrance door.

'That's all Lady Killeen's fault,' Darragh explains; 'she grudged every penny that Killeen spent on the place, and then complained that the grounds looked untidy, and the people didn't like her.'

'I don't see much smoke rising up from the chimneys; I hope they have good fires to welcome us,' Dolly says; and as she commences pealing at the big side bell, Mr. Mackiver utters a sweeping condemnation of the misrule which must have been reigning here for long.

'The gates off their hinges, and not a soul to open the

door,' he growls. 'Are you sure you said in your letter when we should be here, Dolly?'

'Yes, but I said we should be here yesterday; that accounts for their not being ready to receive us,' Dolly says cheerfully, seeing the way to offering a comfortable and satisfactory explanation.

'All the more disgraceful to them for not being in a better state of preparation,' Mr. Mackiver grumbles, and then Darragh, who is tired and ecstatic and disappointed and strangely happy all at the same time, says—

'The bloom is apt to go off the most elaborate preparations after a time, if they're found to be made for nothing! Ah! Phelim,' she cries, as the door opens at last, and a soldier-like looking man appears, whose erect, manly bearing carries the eye for a time from his untidy dress and unsatisfied face. 'Ah! Phelim! you'd have had the door open before if you had known I was with them, wouldn't you?'

'An' it's Miss Darragh herself!' Phelim cries to two or three women who are crowding up the entrance behind him. 'Ah! miss, if you've come back to the old place the changes that have been made in it won't be half so bad.' Then he catches sight of Miss Annesley, and remembers that it is at her instigation that a good many of the changes against which he revolts have been made, and feels that he can tolerate them if she, as his mistress, with that clear, outward look of hers, advises him to do it.

'Phelim was papa's own servant,' Darragh whispers to Dolly; and then she adds apologetically, 'he has gone to rust a good deal since papa died. Killeen turned him into a sort of general hack, and he's lost some of his smartness; but you'll find him a splendid servant if you manage him properly.'

Phelim seems to recover a little of the bygone qualities as his old master's daughter speaks of him to the strangers. He walks on with the air of a Gold or Silver Stick, or of a Lord Chamberlain, or any other functionary whose duty it may be to precede royalty, and leads them into the large drawing-room, where a hastily kindled fire of logs is blazing on the hearth. The rooms have all been rehabilitated handsomely by Robert Annesley for his bride, and in their bright adornments of ebonized brackets and cabinets, olive-green plush tables and chairs, and *portières* and curtains, they have no sort of resemblance to the rooms in which Darragh first played at love and patriotism with her cousin Arthur.

Presently she makes unconsciously a significant commentary on the difference between then and now, which speaks volumes to Mr. Mackiver's sensitive ears.

'There's not a single pane of glass out in the front of the house ; isn't it odd ?' she says, appealing triumphantly to them all, as if she were claiming something like credit being awarded to Phelim for this state of things.

'I think the house is in perfect repair all over, Robert was so particular about that ; he wanted everything to appeal to Marian's taste and heart at once by the *neatness* of each detail ; you know what a neat family the Lepells are, Darragh.'

'There's a few things got out of order,' Phelim puts in mournfully, 'but they'll mostly be out of the master's sight. Anyway, we'll just shove them away somewhere, and the lady that's coming need never have her heart or taste hurt by them.'

Darragh smiles at this, as if it were an ingenious method of dealing with English fastidiousness that meets with her sympathy. But Mr. Mackiver shakes a deploring head, and even Ronald looks military reprehension.

'I advise you not to shove things out of the way, or attempt to practise any sort of slovenly concealment, my man,' he says, addressing Phelim, and Darragh sends a look of surprise and pleading at him, regardless of who sees her.

'The Annesleys are everything to him indeed, when he can bring himself to speak in that way to *my* father's old servant,' Miss Thynne thinks, as with Dolly she mounts the stairs to the bedrooms that have been prepared for them.

They dine well this day. That they do so is evidently a staggering fact to Mr. Mackiver, who has contrived to pass the kitchen door and peep in upon a scene that sends him almost reeling in search of his son, who has found that refuge for the destitute in all country-houses—the billiard-room.

'Such a vision of Pandemonium as I have just had induces very solemn thoughts, and causes me to feel surprised at your frittering your time away in this manner,' the father says, when he has striven to paint with a few bold verbal strokes the picture of that kitchen for his son's benefit.

'If I left off knocking the balls about I couldn't go and cook the dinner,' Ronald says; 'besides, the Powles is here to set these rugged matters smooth, isn't she? Why doesn't she clear up?'

'I'm sorry to say Powles seemed to be one of the noisiest of the crew,' Mr. Mackiver says, with an air of distaste. 'They were all drinking beer and shrieking with laughter at the grimaces of that fellow who let us in, and who appears to me to be imitating some one, and the woman who appeared to be in command of the fires was smoking; we must speak about that: an end must be put to all that sort of thing if the household is to be put upon a decorous footing. And the house will give the tone to everything here;

if there's laxity within there'll be ruin without, and Dolly's money's in the business, remember.'

'Hang Dolly's money! I wish I'd never heard of it,' Ronald mutters.

'Which is almost equivalent to saying you wish you'd never heard of her, since it's impossible, if a girl has ten thousand pounds, not to hear of it,' his father replies; and Ronald torments himself for the next hour with the groundless fear that his father has a suspicion of how he is being bothered and beguiled by Darragh.

But when they meet at dinner at half-past eight there are as few signs of disordered minds in the company as there are of chaos in the kitchen in the dinner. Phelim has ordered the table well, and, inducted into other garments than those which airily adorned him when he admitted them, he shows that he is quite at home in serving ladies and gentlemen.

But his coadjutor Dermot, called in hurriedly from the horseless stable to serve his turn at waiting, is less irreproachable on the surface, though his whole soul is given to the task of acquitting himself well. That punch should have its honoured place on every gentleman's table is one of his simple fixed beliefs, and so, when Miss Annesley asks for a glass of water, he bends down his head and murmurs to her—'Is it for the whisky, then? and will it be hot or could ye'll have?'

CHAPTER XIII.

A WELCOME FROM A CLADDAGH GIRL.

THE air had become bright and almost balmy the next morning. There was not a trace on the earth or in the

heavens above it of that storminess which had been lately raging. The two girls get up early, after the manner of young people in a strange place, or in one which has been familiar, and to which they have lately returned, and are out about the grounds before Ronald has got over the shock of finding that hot water does not flow in his room, and his bath and sponges and towels and soaps arrange themselves noiselessly without his ringing for them and recounting several times the objects of his need.

They get down into the woods which clothe the rugged hill line that runs along between Darragh and the coast, and commence searching for anything green and drooping in the way of foliage that may be utilized for the decoration of the breakfast-table. A few strangely spared fern fronds reward them, but even these are sodden and broken, and anything but suggestive of the ever-verdant aspect of the Green Isle.

‘We must content ourselves with the faithful monthly roses. I saw some holding their pretty pale heads up about the chimneys that I look down on from my bed-room window,’ Dolly says.

‘It’s annoying to have to do that when there will be ferns here in a month that would make a London florist turn pale with envy,’ Darragh says, reluctantly coming away from a fruitless hunt for a fern which she has been accustomed to meet with in profusion on this very spot every spring of her life.

‘In a month we’ll come and look for them again ; meantime don’t scoff at my pale monthly roses ; but I do wish we could get some greenery to go with them. Oh ! Darragh, look ! like enchantment a pretty girl springs up in the path before us, bearing in her hand a flower-pot, and in that flower-pot a fern ! Let us buy it of her.’

‘No, no, no, not *buy* it ; she’s bringing it as a gift,’

Darragh whispers hurriedly, as the girl steps smilingly forward to meet them. 'She's one of the Claddagh girls ; Arthur and I used often to go out in her lover's boat.'

'Mike saw you at the station last night, Miss Darragh, so I knew you were home again, and the fern looked me in the face this morning and told me to bring it to welcome you,' the Claddagh girl says, coming right up to them with the frank, unhesitating certainty that she will be well received. There is something in her sturdy beauty that is not unlike Miss Thynne. Her eyes are as intensely blue, her hair as dark, her complexion even more southern in its warmth and tone ; in fact, her mere physical charms are as great as Darragh Thynne's, but they are coarser—or stronger rather in colouring—and lack that perfection of acquired grace which characterises the partly French-bred girl.

But for all that the Claddagh girl looks like a young native Queen as she stands before them, slim, erect, strong, vigorous, with tender glances in her blue eyes for the young lady who has always interested herself in Mike's fortunes, and a possibility of savagery about her at the same time that impresses Dolly with the conviction that it would be an ill day's work for anyone to offend the young fisher-maiden.

Not that there is a trace of savagery in her mien, which is almost that of a devotee making an offering on a shrine as she places the fern in Miss Thynne's hand. Nor is there anything like barbaric raggedness in her dress. The blue petticoat and jacket are of dark blue duffel, and the cloak is the common red cloak and hood combined ; but they are whole and clean, as are the stout knitted stockings which cover while they reveal the true proportions of her comely ankles and legs, and the stout lace-up shoes which look cruelly heavy for a woman's feet. On the third finger of her right hand she wears a massive gold ring, decorated

with a heart and a crown. This, an heirloom in her mother's family, will stay on this right hand till Mike weds her with it, and puts it on the left. Still, for all this well-to-do seeming, and the perfectly sympathetic air with which the pacific offering is made to Miss Thynne, Dolly feels that the savagery is there—lurking somewhere or other in the guise of this attractive Claddagh girl.

'You must come up to the house and have breakfast, and then come to my room and tell me when Mike and you are to be married,' Darragh says, forgetting in view of the familiar place and face that the house is no longer hers. But she remembers this the moment she has spoken, and turns with a blush and a laugh that covers some confusion to Dolly, and says : 'I may say that, mayn't I, while you are mistress here? I forgot for a moment——'

'If you won't forget in the same way all the time we're here I shall not be happy,' Dolly says earnestly ; and Darragh's summer weather air comes back to her at once, by reason of the supreme trust and confidence she has in Dolly Annesley. But Kathleen, the pretty Claddagh girl, surveys Miss Annesley with jealousy and suspicion as one who in some unjust manner or other is assuming rights and privileges that belong hereditarily to the Honourable Darragh Thynne.

'Then come, Kathleen,' Darragh says, setting off rapidly in the direction of the house : 'you'll find Phelim and the others in the kitchen just the same, and when you've had breakfast you'll come to my room, and you shall tell me about yourselves, and what I shall give you for the wedding present.'

The three girls part where the paths split that lead from the wood to the house. Miss Annesley and Darragh take the one that leads to the front entrance, and Kathleen makes

her way round to the side door that leads into the kitchen, and as she goes she turns and sends a smile like a sunbeam after Miss Thynne.

‘That’s a sweet girl, and a good one too, as well as a pretty one,’ Darragh says to Dolly, nodding back to the girl as she speaks, ‘but I needn’t say she’s good—our Irish girls are all good; you know that, I suppose?’

‘Only on the authority of Mr. Thomas Moore,’ Dolly confesses. ‘I used to rant a poem of his to papa, who liked me to “recite,” as he called it—a poem in which he denounces English society, and declares that the garden of virtue is kept by a dragon of Prudery placed within call, and goes on to say that “so oft that unfortunate dragon has slept, that the garden’s but scantily kept after all.” Now I’m an English girl, you see, Darragh, and so as I *know* he’s so wildly mistaken about us, I have thought he may be equally mistaken in what he says about the Irish girls.’

‘I’m sure he’s not, but what is it? I forget,’ Darragh laughs, and Dolly quotes with enthusiasm, that Miss Thynne may believe is genuine if she pleases :

‘Oh ! they lack the wild sweet-briary fence,
That round the daughters of Erin dwells ;
That warms the touch, while winning the sense,
And charms us most when it most repels.’

‘And that’s true,’ Darragh says thoughtfully, ‘true of all Irish girls, and especially true about those of the Claddagh ; and I tell you what it is, Dolly : if you ever cast a doubt about the truth of that assertion, you’ll plant hatred in the heart of your Irish hearers, and mould a bullet for the heart you hold dearest.’

‘For Ronald’s sake I’ll be careful then,’ Dolly says, as they turn into the house, ‘and, dear Darragh, for your sake

I'll believe the highest things that either poetry or prose can say of Irish girls ; but you must admit that we have a grievance against your bard : he gives you a wild sweet-briary boundary, and claims that you keep within its limits, so no doubt you do ; but why condemn us to the care of an addle-pated dragon who sleeps on guard ?

'Where have you two been ? and what are you talking about ? and who was that reproduction of Mrs. Dion Bouci-cault at her best, who came to the end of the walk with you ?' Ronald asks, coming to meet them.

'We're speaking of English dragons, and agreeing that as a rule they're addle-headed and useless,' Darragh answers for both, and Mr. Mackiver glances up from the breakfast-table, whose arrangements he is supervising, hears her, and imagines that she is assailing him and his admirable intentions under the shield of metaphor.

'It strikes me that a dragon would have no sinecure here,' he says condemningly. 'I took a turn round through the yard, and it struck me that half the population of Galway were being hospitably and hilariously entertained by Mr. Phelim and that horrid freckly woman who calls herself the cook. There was a good deal of milk going, and a suspicion of whisky in the air. There may be a dole on this estate, and this may be the day it's given away, otherwise the appearance was unaccountable.'

'Oh ! I can account for it,' Darragh cries cheerfully. 'In my father's time—always when the family are here, in fact—the servants are accustomed to have their friends come and see them ; it keeps the servants at home you see, Mr. Mackiver ; they don't want to go wandering away into the town if their friends can come here, don't you see ?'

'I think I do,' Mr. Mackiver says, nodding his head with ominous precision and calm. 'When I see an army of

locusts passing over the land I generally see that they are devouring it. Well, well, it's the way it's always gone and always will go here, I'm afraid. Let the friends come and carouse at your expense in idleness till there's nothing but your carcase left, and then ye'll all be ready to curse and swear together at the better luck which attends your more provident neighbours.'

'Idleness! Give them the land to labour on, and see if they won't work like *men*!' Darragh cries, stretching out her hands in her excitement as if he held the land she was asking for. 'Give them homes to keep and food to eat, and see how they'll keep those homes and share the food they freely earn with their friends; give them their own again—their own, that has been clutched from them by tigers blood-thirsty to acquire land—and see how they'll honour it, and guard it, and make it respected.'

Ronald feels that his own cheeks are glowing a little as Darragh, with outstretched hands and upraised head, with a face beautiful as that of Venus, and a voice that rings with the sweet thrilling sadness of the harp, pours forth her words that are half-pleading, half-defiant. But Mr. Mackiver listens to them with an unflushed visage, and with the undisturbed judgment that elderly gentlemen are apt to bring to bear upon girlish rhapsodies—when the rhapsodies are but intended for their (the elderly gentlemen's) subjugation. When Darragh has quite finished, and has even had time to draw a deep breath of indignation at being left unanswered, Mr. Mackiver speaks:

'My dear Miss Thynne,' he says with almost offensive moderation, 'if I turned upon the miscreant who has the miserable low rapacity to own the house in which I live in Russell Square, with a reasonable request to the effect that he should resign that residence to me, and take his petti-

fogging claim upon it to the limbo of other unremunerative investments, I am afraid that I should be regarded neither as a patriot nor as a theme for other patriots to waste their energies upon. I should be treated either as a swindler or as an idiot ; in the one case I should be lodged in jail, in the other in a lunatic asylum, and I should be a fit occupant for both.'

Darragh listens to him while he speaks, and when he finishes she puts her hands up before her eyes, and breaks into a little laugh in which there is nothing that offends Mr. Mackiver. She is laughing at the way he has put it, or rather, she is amused at the way he has put it ; he has no further fear of her ridiculing him, no back-thought of having spoken of him as a dragon ! The girl in her fresh, vigorous, unrestrained and unrestrainable enthusiasm and restlessness and jocund youth, and the man in his time-soured prudence and hard sense and distrust of all that he has not tested by some infallible rule, come nearer together than either of his children will ever come, or than Dolly, with all her rich gift of womanliness and sympathy, will ever come to Darragh.

'You're very misguided,' Darragh says to him presently, shaking her head at him reprovably, but at the same time showering little attentions upon his cup and plate which she has never vouchsafed before. 'You're very misguided at present ; but I must teach you better things, and if I can't, and you fail to improve me—well, we'll put up with one another, won't we ?'

'I should be a rougher old bear even than I seem if I couldn't put up with you,' he says ; and Ronald tells himself that she 'is winning his father for the sake of pleasing him' (Ronald).

But Captain Mackiver is mistaken. No thought of him,

no care for him, no reprehensible sentiment concerning him lurks behind the kindness which Darragh Thynne pours out with all the spontaneous grace of her nature upon Mr. Mackiver from this time ; and by the influence she obtains over him Darragh becomes an important link in the chain which is fast coiling round the families of Mackiver and Annesley.

‘We must put some horses in those stables,’ Ronald says, before they separate after breakfast. ‘It’s a shame such stalls should stand empty. If you don’t want me, Dolly, I’ll have a look at two or three in Galway this morning.’

‘I don’t want you, Ronald, but——’ Dolly begins.

‘I can tell you where to put your hand on two or three that only want a little making,’ Darragh puts in. ‘There’s a man at Oranmore who has his hand on a clever colt for miles round from the day it’s born ; go to him, Captain Mackiver, and if he knows you’re with us—I mean that I’m with you—oh ! *you* know what I mean,’ she cries, hoisting her crimson flag, ‘he will give you mounts that you won’t beat in a hurry in Leicestershire or in the vale.’

‘There you go again with your ill-timed vaunts,’ Mr. Mackiver calls out pleasantly ; ‘we’re wanting something to carry us about, or drag us about, in the shape of horses, and you bear down upon us and want to make us vow that any screws we may have to put up with here are superior to any to be found in the best English hunting-stables.’

‘Ah ! yes, I’ll learn moderation about other things,’ Darragh says, laughing, ‘but you’ll give it up to me that our horses, like our women, and our climate, and our poetry, and our own dear old laws, are the finest and best in the world ? But Dolly had something to say before we were all rude enough to stop her ; what was it, Dolly ? If you’ve forgotten, your cue is “but”——’

‘Robert didn’t say anything about horses; he remarked to me over and over again that the stables were excellent, but he didn’t tell me to fill them with horses,’ Dolly protests.

‘The horses will be mine, dear,’ Ronald tells her. ‘I suppose you have no objection to lending me your brother’s stables?’

Darragh turns away with a half-sigh as the acknowledged lovers proceed in the legitimate way, and after the well-worn pattern, to banter one another in a half-serious way that is neither comic nor inexpressibly tedious to the bystander. ‘The horses will be Captain Mackiver’s. So they will, of course, if he buys them; then I won’t ride *one* of them, no, not *once*; it will be Dolly’s turn, and I’ll wait till Arthur comes.’

Then she remembers that poor Arthur has not the wherewithal to buy a saddle just at present, much less a horse, and so goes rather lugubriously to keep her tryst with Kathleen.

‘I’ll have a pleasant talk with her, and show her what I’ll give her when she’s married, and take pleasure in seeing her pleasure,’ Darragh tells herself nobly. Then she remembers that she has not fixed on anything to give Kathleen yet, and then the reflection that she literally has nothing here to give comes upon her as a temporary damper. ‘But I’ll have a look into my dressing-case,’ she thinks, as she walks upstairs with her country’s fine faith in finding the very thing she is going to look for. But when she reaches her room her attention is diverted from her guest, for Kathleen comes to meet her, looking lugubrious too.*

CHAPTER XIV.

A WORK OF REFORMATION.

‘Now, Kathleen, come and tell me all your news, and let it be pleasant, for I haven’t much that’s pleasant to think about myself,’ Darragh says, with a smile that contradicts her words. She is hoping to avert the bursting of the storm which she sees is rising in Kathleen’s breast about something, and so half appeals to the girl’s generosity to make the best of things.

But Kathleen has no generous feeling to lavish on anyone at the present moment. Her feelings have been hurt and her dignity wounded, and she is not disposed to put a good face on her sufferings ‘even for Miss Darragh’s sake,’ since Miss Darragh seems powerless to protect her in this house any longer.

This feeling is a broadly human one, quite independent of all nationalities, and quite as likely to be dominant in the breast of a peeress as in that of a peasant.

‘It’s little that I have that’s pleasant to say coming from that kitchen now, Miss Darragh,’ Kathleen says, shaking her head dolefully, as if the ways of that kitchen were more than she could bring herself to consider with resignation. ‘Phelim and Molly are just ye know swept out of the way in the swish of wather that Mrs. Powles is throwing over the rest of the dhirt! Oh! it’s a sad sight and that it is, Miss Darragh, in the kitchen; not one bit of comfort; but Mrs. Powles going over everything with a mop and a pail as if those that had been before her hadn’t kept the place clean and fit for lords and ladies, the like of whom *she’s* never served in her life,’

‘If that’s the worst she does we needn’t mind about her, Kathleen. Molly never was good at scrubbing, you know. English cooks like to have their kitchens clean, and as she’s doing the work we needn’t mind it.’

‘But it’s her tongue that goes faster than her mop, Miss Darragh, and the mop’s flying all over the place, so think what the tongue must be, and her sneers at her betters, and she nothing but an odd job woman got in to be servant to these that are not the real master and mistress here even. Said she to Molly, “If your housemaids kept the living-rooms and the bed-rooms no better than you have kept your kitchen, down on your knees you ought all to go and thank Heaven that you haven’t poisoned them all with your dhirt.” Said Molly: “When the gentry here want their carpets dusted they just dance on them, and do the work merrily; and as for the kitchen, I know the duty to his honour my master too well to waste the time in cleaning what’ll get dirty again directly.” So she had her answer from Molly, you see, Miss Darragh!’

‘And what is Molly doing?’

‘What she’s always doing when she ain’t at her prayers or her work, Miss Darragh: just smoking her pipe, like the harmless woman she is.’

‘And who is going to be cook to-day?’ Darragh asks. She is rather glad that this civil war should have commenced thus early, for she knows that it may convince the Annesleys or the Annesleys’ advisers that it will be better for them to rely entirely on native talent in the kitchen if they desire peace to reign in their borders.

‘Who is going to be cook to-day ye may well ask, Miss Darragh; orders have been given to Powles, and nothing’s good enough for her to use. “All them your saucepans?”

said she, and when Molly told her they were, and that it's many the dinner she's cooked in them for highest nobility, Powles snaps her fingers and says, "*That* for your nobility; and your saucepans are old crocks that I wouldn't bemean myself by using."

'I dare say things are worn out,' Darragh says meditatively. 'I have heard that new things *are* wanted sometimes, even for the kitchen; it's not Molly's fault that the saucepans are old. Now, Kathleen, come and see what I'll give you for a wedding present!'

'Yes, Miss Darragh, with all the joy in life, but I'll not come here again,' Kathleen says, reverting to her own wrongs. 'Said she to me when I went in smiling as I left you, Miss Darragh, "How many more beggars turn in here to breakfast every morning?" and said Molly, "This is a Claddagh girl, and no beggar, but one that's favoured by the young mistress;" and she asked what a Claddagh girl was, as if *that* wasn't known to any one, and said she, "Miss Thynne's not the young mistress here any longer."'

'Never mind, Kathleen; here, look at these,' and she showed Kathleen a thick gold throatlet and bracelet to match.

'They're fit for our Lady or the Queen, Miss Darragh!'

'Well, Kathleen, you shall have them, and I'll have my initials and yours engraved upon them, and when I'm married and come to Galway, as I hope to do often, you shall put them on and come and have tea with me, and we'll be very happy and try and forget that I'm not the young mistress here any longer, and that you have been treated rudely for the first time in your life.'

For a moment or two Kathleen is silent. There is a certain charm for her in Miss Darragh's words, and the glittering gold ornaments which are destined for her own

adornment hold a magic spell for her. Nevertheless, she cannot quite rid herself of the remembrance of her grievances just yet.

‘It will be the day that I leave to live and forget everything that I will forget that you ought to be the young mistress here, Miss Darragh,’ she says plaintively, and then she adds brightly, ‘An’ you’re going to be married—to that handsome young gentleman who watched you up the path this morning as if you were one of the stars from heaven!’

‘No, no!’ Darragh cries, blushing, pleased, confused, and vexed even by this random shot. ‘Mr. Arthur and I are going to be married. You know Mr. Arthur!’

‘Yes,’ Kathleen knows Mr. Arthur well, and gives her cordial and hearty approbation to the proposed marriage, but the essentially feminine quality of adhesion to a foregone conclusion causes her to make one more reference to the ‘handsome young gentleman.’

‘I like his looks well, Miss Darragh. He treads the ground as if ’twas his own——’

‘That’s exactly what I object to any one doing at Darragh,’ Miss Thynne puts in laughingly; ‘but he is going to be the brother of the man who has bought this place; he’s going to marry that pretty Miss Annesley, so I suppose we must forgive him if he does walk about with the air of being very much at home.’

‘You find it aisy to forgive him, Miss Darragh,’ Kathleen says, showing her white regular teeth in a charming smile, and Darragh says—

‘Yes; it’s easy to forgive one who never offends you.’

There is a little more talk between Darragh and this girl friend of hers who belongs to another class, but who cannot be truly described as either a “humble” friend or a dependent. Kathleen has as much pride of race in her heart as

the Honourable Miss Thynne has in hers, and she does not depend on any one's favour, bounty, or goodwill in a subservient spirit. At the same time Kathleen can never be either pushing, presumptuous, or over-familiar. In fact, the Claddagh girl respects herself too thoroughly not to respect others.

'Mike will take us out in his big boat when Mr. Arthur comes, I hope,' Darragh says. 'I am going to stay here for some time, I hope, and when the weather changes, at its best in the spring, Mike will take us to Arranmore, won't he?'

Kathleen's eyes sparkle at the prospect, for she feels that whether she is Mike's wife when this happy day comes or not, she is included by Miss Thynne in this scheme of pleasure. An excursion to Arranmore! The mere thought of it, to be taken in such company, makes the light, bright heart of the Irish girl beat within her breast.

Suddenly Darragh's voice in a changed cadence rings out with mournful sweetness :

'I sometimes think that all of us Thynnes are destined to come to bad or untimely ends ; and these ends will come in places or by means of people we love ; perhaps Mr. Arthur and I will be drowned in crossing to Arranmo——'

'Our Lady and the Saints forgive you for those words, Miss Darragh,' Kathleen interposes reprehendingly. 'When our end is to come it will come, whether we're in the places and with the people we love best or not ; and it seems to me that no end can be bad or untimely. God orders it all, Miss Darragh, and He knows better when to take us than we can know when to go.'

'You're a good girl, Kathleen, and you can never come to a bad end, whatever the rest of us may do,' Darragh says, leaping up and kissing Kathleen's broad, fair brow. 'Now

go away, and remember my Arranmore scheme, and pray that we may carry it through happily and safely.'

'Yes, Miss Darragh,' Kathleen says, with cheerful obedience; and then she goes away, bridling a little as she passes within a bow-shot of the kitchen window at the recollection of the indignities which she has suffered there.

In a few days news comes from the master and his wife, which has the effect of altering current arrangements at Darragh. Mr. Robert Annesley writes to Dolly to bid the latter prepare to receive Mrs. Lepell and her daughters without delay.

'We must do all we can to cheer and amuse poor mamma,' the bride writes; 'something will be saved from the wreck for her and the girls, Robert thinks. Indeed, he assures me that there will be enough for them to live on comfortably in London and civilization; but until we know what their actual income will be, they must be content, poor things, to put up with us in the West Irish Barbary to which Robert is consigning us. I hope Darragh will remain. I shan't feel quite isolated from all decent society while the Honourable Miss Thynne is our guest; besides, as Robert says, it will look well in the neighbourhood to be on good terms with the family who once owned our place. As for the rest, Ronald is always agreeable, but Mr. Mackiver never got on well with my family in their prosperity; whether or not he will prove more pleasant to them now they're in adversity remains to be proved—if he stays!'

'Which means that Marian thinks he had better go,' Dolly says laughingly but dolefully to Darragh; 'it isn't pleasant either to have to tell anyone that he or she is detestable to some one else, and yet that's just what Marian expects me to tell Mr. Mackiver now, and assign it as a reason for his going.'

‘I think I should be more inclined to tell him that Mrs. Annesley was detestable, and assign *that* as a reason for his going,’ Darragh says promptly. ‘Your future father-in-law is a dear old man, Dolly, one of the sort I like; he would never countenance a fault or a folly, but if I had committed either I could bear to tell him of it, and bear to be blamed by him, for I should feel that he separated me from my fault or folly, and cared for me still.’

Dolly looks at her wistfully for a moment, so wistfully that Darragh says—

‘What do you want to ask me, Dolly? I know there’s something.’

‘Has Mr. Mackiver been talking to you of any folly that he thinks you have committed, or of any fault that he thinks you may commit?’

‘Dolly, you have the spirit of divination upon you. He has done both.’

Darragh makes her confession of having been judged and condemned in bold buoyant accents in which there is no touch of shame or confusion. Whatever her offence may have been, she has grappled with it according to the best of her belief, and overcome it.

‘Will you tell me what it was?’ Dolly asks. In her eyes there is something about Darragh which is utterly opposed to the possibility of the commission of mere folly. But under pressure or temptation Darragh might be led into grave error. But why should Mr. Mackiver foresee this, and warn her against it?

‘Which do you want to know about—the folly? or the fault that may be?’ Darragh replies. ‘The folly’s the most interesting topic, because that is a done thing, an accomplished fact; the fault will never be.’

She speaks the last words with such determined emphasis that Dolly says—

‘You’re a little proud of your strength of will and purpose, are you not?’

‘Yes; and yet I haven’t *half* the will and purpose you have, for instance; I suppose no power on earth would make you give up Captain Mackiver now you’ve pledged yourself to him—not even if he failed to do all you expect from him, not even if he proved a coward and left a cause that relied upon him?’

‘Ronald couldn’t do anything base; as for the rest, men don’t go out and do doughty deeds in the battle-field for the sake of gratifying the vanity of girls they’re engaged to, or the wives who share their names. If Ronald’s regiment is ordered into action he’ll do his part gallantly enough; whether he ever wins mention or not is another thing.’

‘Well, my folly is this! I’ve engaged myself to Arthur with more thought of what his head may achieve than of what his heart may suffer through that engagement.’

‘But you are fond of him?’

‘Yes, in a way; but I shouldn’t grow grey in a single day, or demean myself in a way that would be suggestive of Hanwell to my friends and relatives, if he discovered that he preferred some other girl to me, and broke it off.’

‘He can’t do that,’ Dolly says confidently. ‘I don’t believe the man lives who could prefer another girl to you; *that* possibility needn’t weigh on your mind.’

‘It’s in my mind, but it doesn’t weigh on it a bit.’

‘Then what are you afraid of?’ Dolly asks straightforwardly; but Darragh’s mood of confidence and gravity has passed away. She is inclined to laugh now at fears and anxieties for the future, and rather astounds Dolly by

breaking into an uncalled-for declaration of pride and satisfaction in some of Arthur's late remarks in the House.

'Don't you wish when you read Arthur's speeches and articles that the man you're going to marry held the pen instead of the sword?' she asks triumphantly; and Dolly answers decidedly:

'No, I don't; I like the two services, and I've always been accustomed to hear them well spoken of, and to see them made much of. I haven't a particle of political feeling in me, and I never read a debate unless it's on the subject of a war somewhere or other in which our troops or ships are concerned.'

'Wretched girl! You won't envy me my position of being the wife of a man who makes himself obnoxious by his brains in the House and out of it, then?' Darragh says, with a smile which seems to express volumes of pride in and contentment with her own lot.

'I shall tell Captain Mackiver how benightedly satisfied you are with him and his career,' she says, 'and after the manner of the nobler sex he will accept the tribute as his due, and not think you the angel you are for holding such views; and then I'll read some of Arthur's speeches to him, and try to rouse his spirit of emulation; but I suppose he thinks Arthur weak, and visionary, and wild?'

'He thinks him reckless,' Dolly says cautiously.

'Reckless! Yes, that's the word that people apply to conduct that is either opposed to them or over their heads. I am reckless too in Captain Mackiver's estimation, but, Dolly, there are certain things that I would rather die than do—and yet many a girl possessing her soul apparently in more prudent, cautious self-control would not hesitate to do them; can you guess what some of them are?'

'I know you could never be mean,' Dolly says; and Darragh replies:

'No—nor treacherous either, and after all there's no merit in not being these things.' Then she goes off with a paper in her hands, in which one of Arthur Thynne's speeches is reported in a most readable manner, and shows it with an edifying air of proper pride in her lover to Captain Mackiver.

It is very easy to make Mr. Mackiver understand that he 'need no longer tarry here.' The old man is full of rectitude, but he is also full of that self-respect which has such a strong admixture of mere worldly pride in it that it is not always easy to distinguish between the qualities.

He has come here wholly and solely for the good of the girl who is to be his son's wife. To him there is an amount of thoughtlessness which almost savours of iniquity in the way in which Robert Annesley, the well-reputed young medical man, has thrown his London chances to the winds, and imperilled his own and his sister's fortunes. Above all things he has Ronald's well-being at heart, and if Dolly's money is riskily placed, Ronald may suffer for it. He knows that the best and straightest way to his end would be to remain here, and see and arrange matters with Robert Annesley as soon as the latter comes home. To get security for that ill-placed ten thousand pounds of Dolly's! this is his object! But he must allow this object to be defeated now, for he is given to understand that Mrs. Lepell and her tribe are coming, and that there will be no room for him in the house.

'If I could only stay and see Robert for an hour I could come to a better understanding with him than we shall arrive at after weeks of correspondence,' he says to Ronald, and Captain Mackiver can only reply:

‘My dear father, in my heart I believe that Dolly’s interests are safe in her brother’s hands ; don’t think me ungrateful for your affectionate anxiety about me when I say this, but Robert Annesley will not lose one pound of Dolly’s fortune—if he does he’ll repay it.’

‘I shall like to have that down in black and white,’ Mr. Mackiver says, and Ronald remarks that ‘it can be arranged in black and white by correspondence at a distance.’

‘I think the house is ordered better now than it was before we came,’ Mr. Mackiver rejoins self-complacently. ‘Dolly takes a hint with remarkable quickness, and without having offended any of the old servants I think Mrs. Powles has wrought a good change.’

‘Dolly’s frightened out of her life of the whole lot of them,’ Captain Mackiver says complacently. Military disciplinarian as he is, he rather prefers that the woman who is to be his wife should know less how to rule than how to serve.

‘For when we’re married,’ Ronald says to himself, ‘I shall take all the trouble of accounts off her hands ;’ which piece of consideration, put into the vulgar tongue, generally means that the wife has to keep house upon little while the husband criticises the arrangements and cavils at the bills.

But Dolly knows nothing of this state of being yet.

CHAPTER XV.

TWO VIEWS OF THE CASE.

It comes about, after all, that Mr. Mackiver has that personal interview with Robert Annesley for which his soul craves ; for Mr. Annesley deems it expedient to precede his

wife and her family in order to assure himself that all things are arranged for exacting Marian's comfort.

He is staggered and annoyed at first, when Mr. Mackiver approaches the subject of the borrowed money, and the way in which it is invested, in the direct and downright way in which it is his habit to deal with all matters. Mr. Annesley is annoyed with Dolly even.

'She had no right to betray my private affairs to the Mackivers, though she is going to marry Ronald. A family confidence should be observed sacredly; and if they put the screw on to make her break it, my poor girl won't have a very happy life with them.' This he says to himself, forgetting that Captain Mackiver has the first right to Dolly's confidence now, and an indisputable claim to know all that may affect the fortune of his future wife.

'Old Mackiver's a meddlesome, mercenary old ass!' Mr. Annesley says to his sister, coming to her in a fume the same evening of his arrival. 'You have told him about that money of yours, it seems, and he wants me to give you a bill of sale on the property, in order that, if anything goes wrong with my affairs, you may come down and make sure of your money.'

He speaks in a deeply aggrieved and injured tone, and all Dolly's generous spirit revolts at the idea of being given such a hold over him.

'Dear Robert, I want nothing of the kind, you're sure of that; and Ronald will listen to me and be guided by me. As for Mr. Mackiver, you must be tolerant to his views; you know how rigorously business-like he is.'

'I am not going to have him dictate the terms I am to make with my own sister. He talks as if he, and not I, were your guardian. I shall pay the interest regularly, and if Ronald wants to handle the capital as soon as he's married

I suppose I shall find some way of paying it, whatever the sacrifice may be : but you're not married yet, and old Mackiver is outside his rights altogether in interfering.'

This is not the tone which Dolly has been anticipating, but she is great at making liberal allowances where she loves warmly and well. Accordingly, now she reminds herself, and puts it as a plea before Mr. Mackiver, that Robert has unexpectedly had enormous responsibilities thrust upon him by the Lepell calamity. To Ronald she only says 'that he must promise her never to worry Robert about that money ;' and he accords the promise glibly enough, for want of money has never been one of the irksome trials under which Captain Mackiver has laboured as yet.

The old man accordingly takes his departure, after uttering warnings that sound like prophecies.

'There is a storm brewing in this land, Mr. Annesley,' he says, 'and if you take the advice of a man who knows the signs of the times, you'll sell at a sacrifice of a little now, rather than remain to have your possessions laid waste for want of labour, and your life held cheap by those who will regard you as the cause of the evils that are coming upon them through their own idleness and folly.'

'I'm quite willing to stake my life and property upon the right-mindedness and probity of the tenants upon this estate,' Mr. Annesley says stoutly, and Mr. Mackiver replies :

'Do so if you will ; but don't stake your sister's ; she belongs to *us* now, and her weal is very dear to me. Her money must be withdrawn from land and invested in something far safer and more remunerative before I shall allow the marriage to take place.'

'To withdraw the money now means ruin to me,' Robert Annesley says passionately ; 'if your son had been engaged to Dolly when this place was offered me, I would have con-

sulted him. As it is, you must trust to my honour and discretion, or break off the match !'

But though he speaks thus defiantly to Mr. Mackiver, he gives Ronald clearly to understand that he has no desire to see the match broken off ; no desire, in fact, to see anything but the most amicable arrangement continue to exist between the two families.

'Dolly is a girl in a thousand, and you're a lucky fellow to have won her, Ronald ; as for the money, that is all right ; you know that as well as I do ; if the worst comes I can always sell, and if I can carry out my plans for increasing the value of the property I shall be able to repay Dolly as she deserves to be repaid, and that will be something very much over and above the interest your father demands ; but meantime I can't be worried—my plans need maturing in order to work well.'

'I hope it won't interfere with your plans to hear that I want to be married in May,' Ronald says.

'May's rather soon, isn't it?' Robert Annesley says thoughtfully. 'My wife will be in deep mourning still, and her poor mother will naturally shrink from the thoughts of anything like festivities ; and, on the other hand, I can't allow my only sister to be married in a hole-and-corner manner.'

'I don't much care how you arrange it, but it must be arranged for May,' Captain Mackiver says. Darragh has just been telling him a legend of Arranmore, and somehow or other, whenever Darragh has been holding converse with him, he feels that it will be better for him to make all fast between himself and Dolly soon. The legend is of

'That Eden where the immortal brave
Dwell in a land serene,
Whose bowers beyond the shining wave
At sunset oft are seen.'

'If you're good and lucky too, and it's a clear day the day we go to Arranmore, you may get a glimpse of O'Brasil,' she says to him.

'And who's "O'Brasil"?—a man or a mountain?'

'Neither. An enchanted island of the blest: I shan't be at all surprised if you don't see it, Captain Mackiver, I often think your vision is defective,' Darragh says, giving him one of her frequent half-angry glances.

'Do you—as for example?' he asks.

'Well, as for example, this morning when you mistook me for Dolly, and laid the rosebuds and shamrock upon the plate before me.'

'It was all the shamrock's fault; Dolly has no enthusiasm for your idolized green-leaf.'

'She wastes her enthusiasm on a brother who doesn't deserve it, and on——' She checks herself, blushing scarlet, and then goes on—

'And on your career, and her intention of making you a most perfect wife. Now my enthusiasms are broader and less personal; they are vested in my country's glory and beauty, and the coming days of her prosperity, and in her bygone triumphs of song and eloquence and war; if you could claim as your own the land that has given birth to an Emmet and an O'Connell, a Moore and a Wellington, you'd be full of proud enthusiasm too, wouldn't you? even if you couldn't get any practical good out of it.'

'Your enthusiasms become you at any rate, and are so much a part of you, in fact, that I wouldn't see you lose one for the world; hence my fault in the matter of the shamrock this morning!'

She laughs at his apology and attempted explanation, but there is always an under-current of sadness in the merriment that goes on between these two.

‘I should like to find a four-leaved shamrock one day and give it to you ; it’s a talisman against all evil, and would give you the power of conferring all good upon your fellow-creatures.’

‘Perhaps you’ll find one the day I catch sight of your enchanted isle from the cliffs of Arranmore,’ he says laughingly.

‘Perhaps I shall ; and if I can pick up two I’ll weave my spells round about that white elephant, Mrs. Powles ; all the old servants are going to leave in a body, and Dolly is at her wits’ end to replace them ; the great Mrs. Annesley will have to put up with some wild specimens of the genus *Servitor* for a time, I’m afraid, unless she brings more cultivated trouble with her in the shape of English servants.’

‘What is the white elephant’s current offence against the native powers ?’

‘Their name is legion : she calls them “dirty,” and that’s an epithet they resent to the death ; and she spoke of Kathleen—my pretty friend from the Claddagh, you know—as a beggar coming in to breakfast ; and she howls at them for smoking, and raises her voice against the time-honoured custom of going bare-footed whenever they can, and altogether conducts herself like a proud usurper. Don’t laugh, Captain Mackiver ; that fierce domestic paragon may bring bitter trouble yet upon the Annesleys.’

‘When Dolly and I are married I’ll get her to come to us as cook,’ he says ; and the young lady who has been wishing to give him moral quinine in the shape of a four-leaved shamrock finds herself fluttering a little at his casual mention of his projected marriage. But she recovers herself gallantly, and before he can even fancy she is embarrassed she is saying—

‘And when Arthur and I come to stay with you she’ll

poison us on account of our nationality, and tell everyone that we're a couple of the "dirty Irish," whom it was her ill-luck to have to serve once. I wonder will Dolly and you share her antipathy to all that's Irish by that time? I'm afraid Mr. Annesley will never be popular nor prosperous here, so Dolly may have good reason to dislike all that reminds her of Darragh.'

'And I shall always love and honour all that reminds me of Darragh,' Captain Mackiver says in a tone that breathes of such heart-felt homage that Darragh would be a cold coquette, instead of the warm-hearted, open-souled girl she is, if she did not vouchsafe him a look of gratitude. But she tempers her mercy with judgment.

'Arthur shall thank you for that pretty speech one day, Captain Mackiver, for I know you mean to include Darragh the girl, as well as Darragh the place, in your kindly memories. Oh, dear! after our parting here I wonder when and where and how we shall all meet again? This being here with Dolly and all of you has been a sunny spot in my life; the thought of it will make me more than unwilling to go back to the arid atmosphere of Lady Killeen.'

'You won't be kept in that atmosphere long, it's to be hoped,' he says.

'You mean it's to be hoped that Arthur and I will soon marry? Well, yes, probably we shall, for we have neither of us anything worth mentioning to live upon, and therefore, after the nature of our improvident race, we shall begin to live upon it.'

'Killeen ought to do something for Mr. Thynne.'

'Yes; I find that everybody says that, with the exception of Killeen and Lady Killeen; they seem to think that Arthur ought to do something for himself, and I agree with them,' Darragh says, relapsing into the safe, justifiably proud

manner about her absent lover which she has thought fit to assume lately. 'Think what brains he has!' she goes on. 'Clever and ready as he always is, Arthur ought to do something to make himself a man of mark!'

'He will do that more easily, I fancy, than make himself a man of money,' Captain Mackiver says uneasily. To tell the truth, he considers the young Home Rule member a hot-headed young fool, who is throwing away all the good chances his family connections might give him for an 'idea' which Captain Mackiver thinks pernicious to the last degree. But how can he say this in the face of Darragh's professed love for the man and the rapturous sympathy with the idea?

'Money! that sordid strain! don't *you* sing it!' she cries. 'For my own part, if I saw my country at rest—at happy, peaceful, contented rest—the noblemen and gentlemen living as became them on their demesnes; the peasants with well-fed and clothed children about them in homes that were fit for human beings, do you think I'd give a thought to the want of *money* in the country for a moment?'

'Only it's the want of money that makes the real picture so sadly the reverse of the one your fancy has painted. Noblemen and gentlemen won't stay on demesnes that may be traditionally highly interesting, but on which they may be shot at any moment by members of a high-minded population who don't work to feed and clothe their children, but who are quite ready to shoot their landlords and would-be employers for leaving the children unclothed and unfed.'

'You take a very narrow, ugly, English view of it,' Darragh says angrily. The cut-and-dried description he has given of the state of affairs seen through conventional English spectacles irritates her by its indefinable admixture of accuracy and untruth.

'A lie that is all a lie may be met and fought with outright,
But a lie that is half a truth is a harder matter to fight.'

And Darragh's conscience tells her that there is at least some truth in this statement of the case which Ronald makes. So she takes refuge in being angry with the want of broad-mindedness which is evinced by it, and fancies she finds comfort in the reflection that, come what will, Arthur will never gall her spirit by finding ugly, reasonable fault with the short-comings of the people who are devotedly ruining the land they and she love so well.

Meantime, the horse-dealer at Oranmore proves himself well worthy of Miss Thynne's good word. The stables at Darragh are soon filled, and well filled too, with horses that are a credit to the place. Two of these belong to Captain Mackiver, but the others are Mr. Annesley's property, and Darragh therefore has no scruple in riding them.

They make a gallant show, these four young people coming out through the lodge-gates of Darragh (which are mended and set straight on their hinges now), and riding through worn-out old Galway's still Moorish Spanish-looking streets. The sight of Darragh, the real daughter of the land, with them insures them glad and hearty greeting from all classes of the country people round about; and Robert Annesley, as he marks the cordiality of his tenants, and the ready deference of the labourers, believes that a blessing is on his scheme, and that as land-owner, large employer, prompt paymaster, and willing and skilful physician, his day will be long and happy in this land.

It almost seems like a special interposition of Providence on his behalf, when a sharp brief epidemic, a sort of low fever and ague, sweeps over the cluster of houses and hovels wherein the greater portion of those employed on the estate dwell. They are very poor, the majority of these people, poor with the poverty that has never known better days, and that consequently has about it no relics of former comfort, no

healthier effects of former happier labours. They are poor with the poverty of generations of improvidence and want, and Mr. Annesley's first great efforts at sanitary reform on his estate are conducted under the most discouraging circumstances. It is difficult to insist upon people scrubbing and whitewashing, draining, and generally improving themselves and their dwellings when they are prostrated with weakness and pain, and have not a farthing to give to another to do for them the work they are themselves unable to perform. But Mr. Annesley meets this difficulty with good sense and liberality. He physics them with well-cooked food from his own kitchen and with doses of quinine introduced into their systems through the agency of a cordial and friendly sherry, and he employs foreign aid to purify their dwellings, and offers good remuneration to those who will come and work at draining the land around. And all this he does with the air of one who deems it his duty to do it, not as one to whom it is a pleasure, or who has any hope of gaining good-will through it.

'They shall feel that I don't think I'm conferring any boon upon them; their sense of independence will make them like me the better for doing it in the spirit of hard, manifest duty,' he tells himself; and he little knows how literally they obey his unuttered wish.

'It's he that has all the glory and the good of the land,' they say, 'and it's little enough that he should try to keep the bodies and souls together of those that work it for him, and make it what it is. Besides, if it wasn't for Miss Darragh it's divil a bit of good we'd get from the house now; they're ashamed to show their beggarly English ways before her whose ancestors wouldn't have demeaned themselves to know medical practitioners.'

So they loyally resent any claim upon their good-will,

much less their gratitude, but graciously permit the alterations the invader makes for their weal, without committing themselves to anything like a friendly policy towards him for the future.

Is it not reasonable that it should be so? Have not Phelim and Molly and the rest of them been obliged to quit their comfortable quarters on account of the English rule that has been established in the kitchen? It is a satisfaction to them to know that the English rule is but a whited sepulchre. The faithful Powles does not take a drop of whisky with her morning's milk, it is true, nor does she smoke the blackened pipe of peace over the kitchen fire with as many inhabitants of the hamlet as like to congregate there. But she has a temper and a tongue, and those gifted with second-sight say that should evil days fall upon them, she will not be half so faithful to the house of Annesley as Phelim and Molly and the rest of the dismissed are to the race that reigned here before Darragh went in the hand of a daughter of that race to enrich the house of Thynne. It chances more than unfortunately, while fever and ague are cowering in the hamlet, and there is slack service in the house, that Mrs. Robert Annesley arrives with her mother and sisters.

CHAPTER XVI.

A SOCIAL ENIGMA.

It is the morning after the arrival of Mrs. Annesley and her widowed mother and orphaned sisters at Darragh, and the young mistress of the demesne is full of family feeling and anxiety, and supercharged with a little fretfulness.

In truth she has a hard part to play, or rather, she

has two hard parts to play; for she must seem to her mother and sisters to be satisfied with Robert's arrangements for her, and she must seem to him to be what she is in reality—profoundly dissatisfied with everything.

'It is only common justice to myself to let Robert see that I feel and know what is due to me, and at the same time I must behave so that mamma and the girls won't begin chipping away at him,' she says to Dolly in the confidence of the dressing-room chat which they two are having together, before they join the others at the breakfast-table.

'If I were you I wouldn't begin by trying to "behave,"' Dolly says; 'it is such hard work, and no one thanks you for doing it, whatever good comes out of it in the end.'

'I suppose you've been behaving for old Mackiver, haven't you?' Marian asks. 'My dear child! profound pity's not what I felt for you when I heard he was here for your good. When friends come to you for your good they always make you yearn for an enemy to come to you for your ill—don't they now? But now tell me, what *shall* I say to Robert? Mamma wants to go out forthwith and play the part of guardian angel to the people who are ill on the estate; now I ask you, can I let her do it? You know what she is; she'll pity them for being what they are till they rise up and stone her.'

'No, they won't do that; stoning people is the form civilization takes up near Manchester. The Irish haven't reached those heights yet; besides, Marian, if she's *kind* they will understand her. Let your mother go about among the labourers here; she has known sorrow—they respect sorrow and women.'

'But Robert will say she is indiscreet!' Marian cries. 'Oh dear! the lecture he read me last night on the way I was to conduct myself here paralyzed my brain—simply

paralyzed it ; and at the end of it all he told me " to be my natural self, and all would be well." Now, can any woman be her " natural self " who's ordered not to be " foolish and selfish and extravagant ? " I felt every one of those things the instant he told me not to be them, and at the end of it all he told me to win the people's hearts by showing regard for their bodies. Dolly ! I ask you—*am* I the woman to do it ? and if I don't seem to do it and like it, your mamma will put her managing hand in, and make matters worse.'

' Let things alone for a little while,' Dolly says philosophically ; ' if you do, you'll find that things settle themselves into very much the same order in which they go in English country places. I could be quite happy here ; the place is beautiful, the people are polite and picturesque.'

' Ah ! but you haven't money in the place,' Marian interrupts peevishly (she knows nothing of that loan of Dolly's to her brother). ' But to Robert and me this is a great undertaking, and neither their pigs nor their policy, their poetry nor their picturesqueness, ought to divert him from his great purpose of making money out of the bargain he has made. I shall feel that we had much better have stayed in Cavendish Square, where I should not have been of much importance, if I have come here to be nobody. Have the country people called ?'

' Here are any number of cards for you,' Dolly says, rising up to fetch a trayful of cards from a corner where they have been reposing. ' Come, Marian, there is the breakfast bell ; put society off for an hour or two.'

' I won't face mamma till I can assure her that the best people have called,' Marian says, tumbling over the cards in the vain, frantic endeavour to find a titled name. ' We have made an immense sacrifice in coming here, and if I am not nicely received, I hope Robert will have proper feeling

enough to get out of it. Dolly, this is iniquitous ! Among all these cards there is only one that I can *mention* to any of my old friends, and she's merely an Honourable : "The Hon. Mrs. O'Leary." Who is she ?

'I don't know,' Dolly says, regarding the card rather stolidly ; for, truth to tell, she has not burrowed for details concerning those who have left cards at Darragh during these last two weeks.

'Well, I must find out. Now, Dolly, do come and look your grandest and best before mamma ; don't let her think that we have *all* gone down. Oh ! I thought it would all be so different—so different !' the poor young wife sighs, as she makes her way down stairs that are not swept to her liking, to a breakfast-table that is not appointed and served to her taste.

'Powles, our cook, is nearly single-handed in the kitchen,' Robert Annesley says, in grim apology to his guests, as they seat themselves round the table ; 'we'll have things in better trim by-and-by, but just now it must be admitted we're a little out of gear.'

'I have always found the breakfasts the real test of a cook's capacity,' Mrs. Lepell says, steering her way of selection through the many steaming dishes on the table to one which is both appetizing and wholesome. 'Dinners are comparatively easy, but it is only a thoroughly good cook who will exert herself in the morning ; I made it the study of my life for years to give Mr. Lepell no cause to complain of his breakfasts.'

'And I hope you will have no cause to complain of them here ; Marian must take a leaf out of your book, and exert herself in the matter,' Mr. Annesley says, meaning to be very gracious. He is really quite in good spirits. The sight of so many people gathered about a well-spread board,

and that well-spread board his own, gratifies his hospitable heart. What though there is civil war in the kitchen? Diplomacy will soon set that trifling wrong right. His hopes are high this morning of living in peace and prosperity within his borders, together with his mother-in-law and others whom the exigencies of fate may compel him to entertain. But he does wish that Marian would put a brighter face upon affairs. There is something discordant in the note of glumness which she is striking, when he is so ready to do anything and everything for her and hers.

‘The girls about here are born cooks; you had better get two or three of them in and train in your own ways,’ Darragh says, misguidedly wandering into the conversation.

‘Oh no!’ Mrs. Lepell replies, warming to the work of hunting a domestic difficulty down at once. ‘Oh, no! if Marian is advised by me, she will have nothing to do with any girls from the neighbourhood. I found out the mistake of doing that at Weybridge—being so near London, you see.’

‘Ah! but this is not near London, and I’m sure Miss Thynne is right about employing native talent,’ Robert Annesley puts in.

‘My dear Robert! I am *quite* aware that I am far from London, and from everything else that I have held dear,’ the widow says reproachfully, and her daughters all exclaim:

‘Dear mamma, don’t!’ and poor Robert Annesley is made to feel himself a miscreant for having interposed his opinion in a matter intimately concerning the well-being of his household.

‘If I were Marian, I would have something done about the tennis-ground at once,’ one of the Miss Lepells remarks;

‘it goes to my heart to see all the lawn looking so boggy, and to know that fine weather may come upon us any day, and we not be prepared with a ground.’

‘It seems to me that we shan’t be prepared with people to play on it, however good the ground may be,’ Mrs. Annesley says resentfully, forgetting her intention of ‘behaving’ grandly before her mother. ‘It must be an odd neighbourhood—the only decent person who has called is the Honourable Mrs. O’Leary.’

Darragh feels both her colour and choler rising at this, for among those who have called are many of the friends of her youth, whereas the Honourable Mrs. O’Leary is a lady who has come rather badly advertised into their midst very recently.

‘I think the cards have got shuffled strangely indeed if Mrs. O’Leary’s comes out as the only decent person,’ she says ; and Mrs. Annesley, pitying her for that innocence of the great world and its ways which she supposes to be characteristic of young ladies brought up in the seclusion of the Irish country and French nunnery, tries to explain the matter to her.

‘I have no doubt the others are most excellent people ; but you see, Miss Thynne, it will only do for me to know the best people ; you, when you lived here, could afford to stoop, but we are new people, and you know, mamma, how particular we were about new people at Weybridge ? Why, you would never go near them—especially if they seemed to want to know us.’

‘I think you’ll find the *Honourable* Mrs. O’Leary wants to know you very much indeed,’ Darragh replies. ‘No one disputes her being “Honourable” or an “O’Leary,” but about here we do object to her tacking the two together in the way she does.’

‘Ah! well, you see I haven’t the local mind,’ Marian says complacently; ‘you don’t like her because she isn’t indigenous to your Galway soil; now, I’m not indigenous either, so we shall fraternize, probably.’

Marian advances the probability with an air that seems to challenge remark, but Darragh leaves the challenge unanswered. It is, after all, really nothing to her that Mrs. Annesley, in her desire to show the old stocks about here that she does not wish to be admitted into their ranks, should declare openly in favour of an unknown woman with no ascertained credentials and of vast pretensions. It is really nothing to her, Miss Thynne assures herself; nevertheless, she is sorry that a woman who can desire to do so should be reigning at Darragh.

The day is drawing very near now when Captain Mackiver’s leave, which has been extended again and again in response to his earnest plea of urgent family business, will really expire, and he begs that the long-talked-of trip to Arranmore may come off before he goes. It is in vain that Darragh, who does not wish to be in his company under abnormal circumstances, protests that the spring is not far enough advanced or the weather sufficiently settled for them to see ‘loved Arranmore’ in all its beauty. She has them all against her. Ronald in his heart of hearts knows that he would feel warm at the North Pole, and see beauty in the antics of a Polar bear, provided Darragh breathed the same atmosphere and witnessed the same sight. Unsuspicious Dolly is glad to go wherever Ronald feels impelled, even though their course be over desperate seas in an open boat.

‘It will stand between me and my rest if I don’t see the enchanted isle,’ Dolly says; ‘and if I see it, I’m afraid that I shall know no peace till I’ve tried to get to it in a seaworthy boat.’

'I think all such legends are sheer rubbish, only fit for nursery-maids to tell to children,' Marian says contemptuously; and Mrs. Lepell endorses her daughter's view of the case, adding:

'I always made a point, when you girls were children, of dismissing any nurse who talked to you of ghosts or fairies, or any vulgar nonsense of the kind. I am really surprised to hear Miss Thynne and Dolly going on as they do about enchanted isles, and other wicked deceptions.'

'There's no deception about it,' Darragh laughs; 'our island only pretends to be a delusion—it melts away as you try to approach it.'

'Like a good many other Irish things that look very well at a distance,' Mrs. Lepell says significantly. 'I can't say honestly that I even consider your potatoes unapproachable. We grew much finer ones at Walton; and, as for your Irish beauties, where are they, I should like you to tell me? I haven't seen what I consider a good, clear light blue eye since I came here—not the real "china blue, you know, Marian," that goes with pretty fair hair and a good complexion.'

'We will give up our eyes and potatoes, if you please, but we'll cling to our legends, Mrs. Lepell,' Darragh says, laughing. 'I'm quite certain if I got on the cliffs at Arranmore, I'd make you see the enchanted isle in a very short time. It rises slowly, slowly out of the shadows on the sea on warm hazy days, and then you see it in the blue distance for a few minutes—a little land of verdant plains and wooded hills, of rippling rivers that gleam like silver when the sun is shining, and with groves of flowers that glow under a light that ne'er is seen on sea or land elsewhere.'

'It's the old story of the mirage in the desert,' Mrs.

Annesley says contemptuously ; I wonder you imaginative Irish—as you pride yourselves on being—haven't got up something more original. But, though the story is all nonsense, it will give us a "motive" for a nice pleasant picnic on the real island that we are going to ; I like a motive always when a pleasure trip is planned ; something definite to be seen or done or eaten ought always to be provided when people break up their everyday life, and go out in search of novelty and enjoyment ; your legend will do very well in this case, and I will take care that we have a good lobster-salad lunch to pass away the time, while we're waiting for your blessed isle to pop up.'

'Marian has such a fund of practical good sense,' Mrs. Lepell whispers to Captain Mackiver ; and he answers :

'Yes ; she would dash down any illusion, I should imagine.'

'Exactly. I have always discouraged illusions, on principle,' Mrs. Annesley replies, with an air of the most edifying self-complacency. 'I'm afraid Robert is a little addicted to indulging in them, and he will find me most unsympathetic in every case where he is.'

'Dolly used to say my *one* fault was that I was a little too prosaic. I never looked through rose-coloured spectacles. I used to tell her that the blue bloom which hangs about the woods by the river-side, and which she always thought so beautiful, was in reality an unhealthy haze,' Mr. Annesley says ; and his wife answers :

'Oh yes ! I can quite believe that Dolly outdid you in romantic folly, and I really advise Captain Mackiver to check the quality as much as he can, or Dolly will be leading him to invest in land in some barbarous clime where their only neighbours will be savages and cannibals,' Mrs. Annesley says, lashing herself into wrath with her own words.

‘What is my last offence?’ Dolly asks. ‘Listen, Ronald, while Marian speaks for your good.’

‘Oh! I dare say it’s a very good joke to you,’ Marian says angrily; ‘you are not going to live here all your days, and of course it’s nothing to you whether Robert fritters away his money on an idea in a place that hasn’t a single advantage that I can see. I shall always think, Dolly, that you might have persuaded Robert out of buying this place; instead of that, you rushed over here in a madcap way with him, and never gave me the option of protesting against my fate till it was fixed.’

‘As it is fixed, and not by Dolly, perhaps you’ll not blame her any more about it, dear,’ Mr. Annesley says good-temperedly. But Marian thinks she is treating the subject rather well, speaking with much sound sense and discretion, and not a little eloquence about it, therefore she goes on, regardless of her husband’s warning:

‘I’m not “blaming” Dolly, Robert; I only want to point out to her the evil that may be done by thoughtlessly thinking of one’s self only: now, if Dolly had reflected on what my position would be here for life instead of merely thinking that Darragh would be a pleasant place to spend a summer holiday in herself, it would have been better, you must allow?’

‘I’m not at all disposed to allow it,’ Mr. Annesley says sharply. It is more than humiliating to him that his wife should speak before Captain Mackiver, who knows the truth, as if Dolly had counselled him (Robert) to stake his own money for her possible pleasure, while her own interest remained intact and untouched. ‘If Marian only knew how it is, she wouldn’t make such a fool of herself,’ he thinks. But he does not dare to tell Marian ‘how it is;’ therefore Marian goes on blundering, under the impression that she is discoursing of a family mistake most sensibly.

'You may not be disposed to allow it, Robert, but the conviction may be forced upon you in time, when my health and spirits flag under the endless wear and tear to which I shall be subjected here through the stupidity of the only servants I can get to stay in this out-of-the-way place.'

'The better sort are waiting to see what you are like before they engage themselves to serve you,' Darragh says, laughing. 'I think even as it is your experience has been rather a happy one. Consider how short the time is that you have been here—only a fortnight.'

'It seems like three months,' Marian says pettishly, 'and in that fortnight I have had five housemaids, each one worse than the one who went before her, and now Powles is becoming unbearable——'

'Oh! cast her off, and have done with her!' Robert Annesley interrupts. 'You would have had the same household troubles if we had stayed in town, Marian. Let us settle this about the trip to Arranmore; how many shall we be?'

'I shall not think of going,' Mrs. Lepell says at once, and her younger daughters 'beg off' from the trip also. The truth is, a picnic unenlivened by the presence of any other men than their own brother-in-law and Dolly Annesley's lover seems to them a flat, tame, and unprofitable thing. Accordingly they declare in favour of remaining at home.

'There will be five of us, then,' Mr. Annesley says. 'Ronald, you and I will secure a boat this afternoon, and start to-morrow early.'

'There will be six of us,' Marian interposes. 'I have asked Mrs. O'Leary to go with us; she is getting up a splendid party for us, and I should like to show her some attention in return.'

'All right, dear; but I can't say that I like the woman,'

Robert Annesley says, and his wife and mother-in-law chant in chorus :

‘Oh, Robert ! how *can* you say so ? She’s charming, positively charming !’

‘I wish, while she was about it, she had chosen a foreign name and title, not an Irish one,’ Darragh says. ‘She might just as well have come forth as a German baroness, or a French *marquise*, or a Spanish countess ; I’ve no doubt she speaks each language with the same beautiful ease and facility with which she speaks English.’

‘It is rather hard to accuse a woman of being an adventuress and an impostor *merely* because she is beautiful and unprotected, and has the ill-luck to be married to a brute who has deserted her,’ Marian says warmly.

‘And you should remember, before you throw stones at her, that her desolate position is forced upon her by one of your countrymen, Miss Thynne,’ Mrs. Lepell adds, reprovingly, for she, like her daughter, has succumbed to the influence of the current Galway mystery, the handsome Honourable Mrs. O’Leary.

‘Her house is quite an oasis in the desert here,’ Mrs. Annesley says admiringly ; ‘she has such perfect taste. She was showing me the way she had painted her doors yesterday, painting bulrushes on the panels in the dining-room, flamingoes and sunflowers in the drawing-room, and the dearest little love-birds and buttercups all round the dado and the door of her boudoir.’

‘I don’t see the connection between flamingoes and sunflowers ; and love-birds and buttercups don’t grow together,’ Dolly says.

‘Art doesn’t regard such details,’ Marian explains.

‘Did you see her painting them, Marian ? or have you taken them to be her work on trust ? There’s a young

fellow at the picture shop at the corner of Eyre Square who does the stork and sunflower business at so much a foot ! I'm afraid your new friend fails to distinguish between ordering the work to be done and executing it,' Mr. Annesley remarks. Whereupon Marian avers that she felt from the first that something invidious would be said about the *only* person whose presence was likely to give a grace and charm to life in the neighbourhood.

'Such unworthy, petty suspicions,' Mrs. Annesley adds. 'I should really be ashamed to say that I thought anybody—much less a woman of rank and position—was telling me a story about such a trifle ; there's something quite pathetic, I think, in the fact of her trying to occupy herself and beautify the existence that a wretch of a husband has nearly laid waste. And she feels things so keenly, too ; she says she knows the reason she's not popular here is because she's a living monument of the baseness and fickleness of an Irishman.'

'She doesn't spare the absent Honourable Something-or-other O'Leary apparently,' Darragh laughs ; 'one is almost tempted to ask why honour the place that is so ungrateful with her presence?'

'Perhaps her credit is good still,' Captain Mackiver is saying, when the Honourable Mrs. O'Leary is announced, and an unmistakably remarkable-looking woman walks into the room.

CHAPTER XVI.

ON ARRANMORE.

THERE is the sweetest possible promise of sunshine and spring-tide beauty generally in the air as the party from Darragh, enriched by the Honourable Mrs. O'Leary's

presence, step into the boat that is waiting to take them over to Arranmore. The merest whisper of a breeze is stirring the waters of the bay into baby ripples, and the little craft sets forth on her miniature voyage, freighted with a gay and happy company.

Mrs. Annesley has been persuaded to relinquish her cherished intention, and leave the hamper which she has designed shall be one of the chief features of the pleasure trip behind her.

‘Let us trust to the frugal fare they will provide for us at the Atlantic Inn,’ her husband decrees; and though Marian grumbles a little, and suggests that ‘frugal fare’ hurriedly prepared by the inexpert hands of a cook at an out-of-the-way inn is apt to be both unappetizing and indigestible, she is outvoted by such a large majority that they go forth hamperless, but hoping for the best.

The two girls, Darragh and Dolly, are delightful visions to the idlers lounging about the place of embarkation as they spring from the car, drop their wraps, and stand revealed in all their slim, girlish grace, in the most perfectly fitting navy-blue serge suits. But trim and taut as they look, with their short-kilted skirts and Jersey bodices, and strong, shapely little boots, they cease to be objects of paramount interest when Mrs. O’Leary drives rapidly to the trysting-place in the smartest car in Galway, and descends from it with an air that might become the Queen of Connaught herself.

A remarkable-looking woman truly, endowed with a fine physique, a grandly set-on head, and a face full of beauty—beauty both of expression and feature, though the first is a curious mixture of sensuousness and intellect, and the mouth and nose are wide and unclassical to a degree.

She looks the world boldly in the face from out of a pair

of large blue eyes that fire and melt alternately as their owner passes rapidly from one mood to another. Her brow, from which the soft, golden brown hair is lifted in a large wavy roll, is open, unruffled, and fearless. About her there is a habit of command that makes every service rendered to her seem her due. She speaks the English tongue with colloquial fluency. She dresses in robes that are formed by the most consummate dress-artists out of the richest materials that the looms of the day can supply. To see her is to be charmed with her, and at the same time to doubt her. To know her is to be puzzled until you are provoked with yourself for knowing her, and, additionally, for being puzzled and provoked about her. With the candid air of a child, she contrives to conceal from you everything you desire to know about her. At the same time she piques curiosity by half-gratifying it, and charms women into forgetfulness of the fact that she fascinates every man's attention away from the quarter in which it is righteously due as soon as she addresses herself to the task of doing so. Altogether, one is impelled to ask, 'What brings such a woman as this to the west coast of Ireland?' and the answer may not be given yet.

There is a general effect of 'purple and fine linen' about her—of sumptuousness and splendour. As she steps into this open boat which is about to waft them over a cool spring-tide sea to a wildly picturesque island, she gives bystanders the impression that she is rather over-dressed. But this is due rather to her adjustment of it than to the material or make-up of the dress itself. The dress is only of the darkest blue cashmere, made in the form of a plain skirt and long tight jacket. But sable edges every part of it, and a circular mantle of sable, fringed with sable tails, hangs upon her arm.

The loiterers around greet Darragh Thynne with as much loving respect as they could show to a queen to whom they were loyal, and to Dolly Annesley they accord a meed of smiling good-will, that is due partly to the unconscious charm of her unstudied graceful desire to please them, and partly to her being Miss Darragh's friend. But to handsome, well-appointed Mrs. O'Leary they give nothing but a sarcastic attention that stings her more than have the polished and delicately-tipped shafts of neglect which have been let fly at her by many of her more highly-placed neighbours. When one of them offers to carry her 'ladyship's honour's cloak,' she refuses the proffered service with asperity, and as the one who proffered it falls back laughing to his mates and uttering some words significant of his belief in the sound of the handle to her name being a novelty to her, she says to Mr. Annesley :

'After having spent the best part of my life in the Courts of Europe these people seem very coarse and rough to me. Don't you find them so?'

'Well, to tell the truth, I'm more at home with them than I should be with kings and queens,' he says, with such polite gravity that Mrs. O'Leary repents herself of having spoken as she has of her familiarity with the 'Courts of Europe.'

But there are no signs of either penitence or the occasion for, as beautiful, bright, and beaming, she seats herself in the bow and drapes her sable cloak about her. This open social intercourse with the Annesleys, and with Miss Thynne, one of the old stock, that is visible to the eyes of all Galway, may be of eminent service to her. And as for Robert Annesley's barely concealed indifference or antipathy to her, no matter! She can bide her time, in certainty as to the result when a man is concerned.

Marian Annesley's ears are delicately attuned to catch any mention that may be made of the highly-placed ones of the earth, therefore this casual remark about the Courts of Europe is more than pleasing to her ; for the one who speaks of them is her friend—*her* friend especially, sought out and cultivated by her against the advice of her husband.

‘My intuitions are more delicate than Robert’s or than Dolly’s,’ she tells herself. ‘I seem to *feel* when a person is a “somebody” ; and the moment I saw Mrs. O’Leary, I felt sure that she was a person of consequence. There’s something about her that makes me think she has “a story,” that I only hope she will learn to regard me as a friend and confide it to me.’

This much must be conceded to Mrs. O’Leary, that she is a picturesque conversationist, whether she is ‘a person of position with a story,’ or not. She has evidently seen a good deal of several sides of life in several parts of the world, and the way she has of glancing back and giving brief glimpses of many scenes in many lands, with herself as the central figure always, has its fascinations.

They have lunched satisfactorily at the Atlantic, and the landlord has given his word of honour that their dinner and beds shall be on a corresponding scale. For they have listened to the voice of the chartered charmer whose boat they have come in, and decided that it is impossible to do justice to Arranmore’s many beauties in one day. Therefore, as the air is balmy and the sky as blue as it can be in the boyhood of the year, they are loitering away the idle hours on the cliffs in the most approved fashion.

They have looked afar in vain for ‘Hy Braisil,’ but the enchanted isle, resenting their want of faith, probably, has remained in rigid seclusion beneath the waves.

‘The Pagan’s Paradise is like the country-people of to-

day—it won't show us any civility because we're strangers yet,' Mrs. O'Leary says, in her loud, clear voice, a voice in which there is a peculiar echo, that is not nasal by any means, but that reminds those who hear it of other voices that they heard, that have a nasal twang in them. Indeed, as Ronald observes to Dolly, at whose feet he is reclining, a short space apart from the others :

'Mrs. O'Leary reminds me of a good many things—the Queen of Sheba, Paris during the Second Empire, a *table d'hôte* at the Fremont in New York, and——'

He pauses, for Mrs. O'Leary's ears have caught the words which were intended for Dolly alone, and she comes towards them at once, saying :

'You speak of New York, Captain Mackiver. Have you been there lately? Before my heavy trouble fell upon me' —(by this they are to understand her marriage with the absent O'Leary)—'I knew New York well. My father held an important position under Government, and I was as much at home at the White House as if I had been the President's daughter.'

'Then you are an American?' Mrs. Annesley says. 'I should not have thought——'

Her further utterance is checked by a gentle waving of the handsome head of Mrs. O'Leary.

'No !' she says, smiling wearily, as if it were really too much trouble to set people right who are capable of making such mistakes ; 'I have nothing to do with the Stripes and Stars ; it was as an Envoy from another Power that my father was in New York. But I must not say too much, or I may compromise some personages who are so highly placed that you would naturally feel very curious to find out all I could tell you !'

'Was Mr. O'Leary an Envoy from a foreign Power also ?'

Darragh asks quietly ; and Mrs. O'Leary shakes her head in gentle deprecation of such an evil—even though the time when it might have occurred is long past.

'Oh no, no !' she says fervently. 'Didn't I say that it was before trouble had touched me that I knew New York ? It was after that—long after—that my evil fate found me, and I quitted a palace to follow the fortunes of a man who had alienated me from those who loved me, and whose love secured for me the consideration of every one who approached me, and has made me an outcast and a beggar !'

A smile plays round the lips of some of her audience as she says this, but Marian Annesley is intensely touched. It would be pleasanter, of course, to be the bosom friend of a woman who is still the occupant of a palace ; but, that being impracticable, it is highly satisfactory to be on such terms with one who has once dwelt in palatial halls.

'And what she must have been accustomed to, when she calls it being "an outcast and a beggar" now, though she's living in such good style !' Mrs. Annesley thinks complacently. 'And evidently, though the man she married is an Honourable, her family thought him no fitting match for her.'

'I don't think that any of our friends here present have the slightest sympathy for people whose fortunes have fallen,' she says, visibly ranging herself on Mrs. O'Leary's side, and casting a sweeping look of reproof round the rest of the circle. 'It's the fashion with some people to scoff at those who have undoubtedly known what it is to be more highly placed in the world than they are at present ; and both you and Dolly follow that fashion, Robert, I'm sorry to say.'

'I can't endorse that sentiment, Miss Annesley,' Darragh says.

'I don't consider you a case in point,' Mrs. Annesley is beginning, when Darragh interrupts her to ask laughingly :

‘How is that? Is it that you don’t think the days I have known better than these present ones for me, or——’

‘Well, honestly, I must admit that I can’t understand any one regretting life at Darragh,’ Marian puts in scornfully. ‘I should think your home in London with the Killeens pleasanter than it could have been at Darragh, especially when everything was out of order as Robert describes its having been when he came first.’

‘Dolly and Captain Mackiver, let us go and have one last look for the enchanted isle and for a four-leaved shamrock,’ Darragh cries impatiently. The girl’s spirit is being constantly chafed by Mrs. Annesley’s veiled rebukes and sneers, and yet at other times Mrs. Annesley’s manner is all friendly kindness. ‘What can it mean? What is she driving at?’ Darragh asks herself in vain, for she can find no reasonable answer to the question. It has not dawned upon her yet that Mrs. Annesley has almost unconsciously set Darragh Thynne up as a type and embodiment of the land which she (Marian) will never learn to love. ‘All that’s best of dark and bright’ in the Irish nation and nature seems to Mrs. Annesley to meet in a highly-concentrated form in Darragh Thynne.

Before that unconscious young person comes back from the stroll which she has lured Dolly and Ronald into taking with her, another poisoned dart has been let fly at her, glancing through Mrs. Annesley’s mind as it wends its way. Mrs. O’Leary has, in the course of these last few hours which they have been spending together, discovered that Miss Thynne is too noble to be her ally and too clever to be her tool, and it is this woman’s self-appointed mission to make every other woman whom she comes across one or the other. Mrs. O’Leary is far too clever to deceive herself. She always knows when she has made a slip, and she knows

that she has made a terrible one in talking about her familiarity with the 'Courts of Europe' and the White House in New York before Miss Thynne. 'What she thinks is no matter as far as she herself is concerned,' the astute lady tells herself; 'but what she says to this priggish, plebeian Mrs. Annesley is important. While I'm here and when I go up to London in June, Mrs. Annesley can do a great deal for me; and I'll take care that she does all she can.'

Miss Thynne, in fact, is as fretting as an evil conscience to the lady who has been as a daughter to some unnamed President; and so when she and Mr. and Mrs. Annesley get themselves together on their way back to the inn she says, casting a glance after the three young people who are off in another direction——

'Your sister is to be married soon, I hear?'

'I hope not,' Robert Annesley replies, quickly thinking of that ten thousand pounds of which he will have to render an account when that dreaded wedding-day approaches.

'But you ought to be glad, Mr. Annesley, and to hope it will be soon; for your sister evidently adores Captain Mackiver.'

'They're very happy as they are, and I don't want to lose Dolly yet—do we, Marian? We don't want to lose Dolly yet,' Robert says, discreetly including Marian in his second enunciation of the praiseworthy fraternal sentiment.

'I'm not selfish enough nor silly enough to wish Dolly to keep unmarried for our sake,' Marian replies frigidly.

'I should be rather afraid of delay if Miss Dolly were my sister: in the case of a man so susceptible as Captain Mackiver is, it is very dangerous,' Mrs. O'Leary says.

'Susceptible! That's just exactly what Mackiver is *not*,' Robert Annesley says, with decision. 'He's very reasonably and properly attached to Dolly, but he's too guarded a

fellow altogether to let loose the reins of feeling and give himself up to the luxury of loving whatever he looks on that is lovely. Delay is not dangerous in Ronald Mackiver's case.'

'He may not "be giving himself up" to the luxury of loving Miss Thynne, but she is compelling him to do it as fast as she can. I saw that before I had been an hour with them to-day, and that is the reason Miss Thynne has been treating me with that disagreeable, distinctly English, guardedly uncivil manner of hers.' Mrs. O'Leary says out these words slowly and distinctly, with the evident intention of giving her auditors plenty of time to mark and digest them. As she has hoped, they palpably wound the brother of the girl from whom she avers Darragh Thynne is luring her lover. But she fails to sting him into speech. It is Mrs. Annesley who answers her, and that without any regard to Dolly.

'But Miss Thynne is distinctly Irish—Irish to the backbone. No well-bred Englishwoman would be guardedly uncivil to any person of consequence, I assure you; especially after hearing that your father was an Ambassador and all that sort of thing; she would be incapable of it.'

'And Darragh Thynne is incapable of being "guardedly civil" or guardedly "anything" that's low and mean to any one; and Marian, you had better be careful how you promote people verbally. Mrs. O'Leary will have a difficulty in dealing with her father soon if you make many more honourable mentions of him.'

"I said he was an Envoy, if you remember, dear," Mrs. O'Leary explains to Marian; 'and indeed,' the lady goes on sweetly, 'I almost regret having said that, even; it looks like vaunting. Now you, I'm sure, think me a boaster; don't you, Mr. Annesley?'

'It would hardly become me on so short an acquaintance to tell you what I think of you, however flattering my opinion might be,' Robert Annesley says, laughing himself out of the corner into which she has boldly thrust him. And then Marian quite unintentionally comes to his aid by asking :

'But what do you mean about Miss Thynne and Captain Mackiver? You don't mean to say you think she's wicked and cruel enough to want Ronald to jilt Dolly for her?'

'I merely say she is luring him to love her as fast as she can. I'm a woman with some experience in such matters ; and I can see when a man's eyes and heart and intellect are all engrossed with *one* woman as quickly as anyone. Captain Mackiver is so engrossed, and the woman who engrosses him is not your sister Dolly.'

'I think we may safely leave my sister to hold her own, and I certainly have no intention of discussing an imaginary wrong,' Robert says impatiently. He hates the woman who has made the suggestion to him that his sister is in danger of losing her lover ; he hates himself for feeling, though it nettles his pride, that it would solve one of his most difficult problems—namely, the having to find ten thousand pounds for Dolly in May.

Above all, he is angry with his wife for having brought this woman into their midst. Mrs. O'Leary's beautiful person has no charm for him. There is something in her frank, fascinating voice and manner that rings false in his ears and estimation, and he has a foreboding that in some way or other she will work harm of a serious kind, either socially or morally, to him or his.

Feeling thus, he cannot fall in with the vein of gay humour which Mrs. O'Leary strikes presently, when the whole party reassemble at the inn and go to dinner with what appetite they may. But, though he takes no part in

the conversation, he is watchful, and observes that Mrs. O'Leary spares no pains to draw Darragh Thynne and make the girl show herself at her brightest and best.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MISCHIEF BEGINS.

SLEEP plays strange tricks with Ronald Mackiver this night. At first she flirts with him, pressing his eyelids for a few moments, and then sliding away, leaving him wider awake than before. After a time she plays more fantastic tricks still, half-steeping his senses in oblivion and leaving them half-conscious of a cause he has for feeling intense pleasure and intense pain. Eventually she settles down upon him in earnest, and then commences to send his mind roving wildly in all sorts of directions.

Darragh comes before him in dozens of desperate situations in these dreams, and in divers of her ever-varying, ever-charming moods. He sees her bending over straw pallets soothing the suffering, the sick, and the dying. He sees her galloping across the open country bearing the tidings of freedom and plenty to the enslaved and starving. He sees her standing, surrounded by groups of richly-dressed women and well-bred looking men, playing the part of hostess in rooms that suggest splendour and rank and wealth—rooms that are fragrant with flowers and melodious with the sound of unseen harps and sweet voices, and some one whispers to him that she has 'sensibly renounced her ideas, and married Portbank after all,' and even while he is listening to this he sees her sitting on the cliffs at Arranmore, looking vainly for the island of the blest to show

itself to her, and searching for the four-leaved shamrock to give to him !

He wakes with a happy start and with his heart beating wildly, for in his dream he had been on the cliffs with her, with none other beside them, and it is hard to realise for a few moments that the intense joy he had felt was only a dream. When he does realise it he knows there will be no more sleep for him, and as the bright dawn is breaking with golden radiance in the east, he resolves to get up and go down and see the sun rise over the sea.

‘I wish I knew which was Dolly’s door,’ he says to himself, as he passes out on to the landing, and pauses a moment at the head of the stairs ; ‘I’d knock and ask her to get up and come out with me ; my dear girl and I won’t be together after to-day, till I come and claim her for my wife.’ Then, as he does not know her door, he goes on and out of the inn, unseen by any but two or three of the earliest birds among the servants, who smile and nod their heads knowingly, and remark to one another that ‘sure the gintleman knows where to look for something purty,’ when they perceive the direction he takes.

There is a good deal of soft warmth in the air in spite of its being early morning still, and when Ronald has watched the sun rise out of the sea and flood the earth and air with glory, he saunters on to the ruins of the Seven Churches, and sits himself down on a piece of sculptured stone close by the shaft of a ruined cross, on which can be traced an inscription in the ancient Irish characters. He is employed in sketching this roughly as a memento of this, the last day he will be with Dolly for some time, when, on glancing towards the cliffs to his left, he sees a woman’s form seated just as he saw Darragh in his dream.

She is alone, seated on a bit of rock, her elbows resting

on her knees, her chin supported in her hands, her eyes turned oceanwards. She does not see him, and he feels that it will be better for him not to make his presence known to her ; in fact, he resolves without hesitation upon making his way back to the inn without being guilty of a sign. She has come out to be alone and to commune with her own thoughts. He does not dare to intrude upon her ; still he lingers, and the sketch he has commenced in commemoration of this being his last day with Dolly flutters neglected to the ground.

He is not near enough to see the expression of her face, but there is something infinitely touching in the sad, steadfast attitude. 'That girl is far from being happy,' Ronald thinks ; and if it were not for a restraining recollection of Dolly he would go and try to comfort this realisation of his dream.

Presently she gets up, and with a thrill of something that is half-dread and half-delight he sees that she is coming straight for the group of ruins among which he is half-hidden. As she comes nearer he sees her face is very pale : there is no morning bloom upon it, and her eyelids are red, as though she had been crying. Perhaps she has had a sleepless night, perhaps her heart is heavy, too, perhaps her dreams have been disturbed by thoughts of him.

'Dolly, you're worlds too good for me,' he almost moans aloud, as this possibility strikes him, and then, in spite of his resolution and remorse, he steps out to meet the girl whose heart, he feels exultantly, is heavy for him.

But she gives him no cause for triumph when once she becomes conscious of his presence. If he has been in her thoughts, and those thoughts have been heavy with her love that must not be, as she has sat looking over the sea, there is no trace of either sadness or love in her bright, careless, beaming face as soon as she catches sight of him.

'You out, too?' she says unconcernedly. 'I thought I was the only one of the party silly enough to come out before breakfast in search of the *Adiantum* and the *Asplenium marinum*. See what a lovely bunch of fronds I've got! Have you found any?'

'I haven't even looked for them.' He speaks stiffly, for it hurts his manly sense of what is due to him, that she withholds this tribute of going heavily and sorrowfully on his account from him.

'What brought you out then? Did you want to make a sketch?'

'I couldn't sleep, and I preferred being restless and miserable in the open air to being the same thing in a little stuffy bedroom.'

'Poor Captain Mackiver, you leave Dolly and——' She is about to add 'Darragh,' but pauses, remembering that it is her own name as well as the place's, 'to-day,' she goes on, after a moment's hesitation, 'but May will soon be here. Think of that!'

'I have thought of that. I am quite alive to all the happiness and all the advantages in store for me.'

'I'm glad of that; so glad; for Dolly's a girl of girls. Won't you go on and get a root or two of these ferns? You'll find plenty of them in the clefts of the cliffs, and I think both Dolly and you will like to have them by-and-by; I hope mine will live to remind me of my day on Arranmore.'

'Have you got them up by the roots?'

'No. How stupid of me to have forgotten to do that, and then to expect my fronds to continue to be lasting remembrances; but you'll get yours up by the roots and give me some of them. Now I'll leave you to your work, and go back and rouse up Dolly.'

'You're in a great hurry to go in now I have come out,'

he says discontentedly. It vexes him that the girl should be the first to propose doing what is right. He could bear the loss of her society with far greater equanimity if he had been the one to suggest that she should deprive him of it. In fact, he is no hero, but a man—with a man's sense of its being in the proper order of things that the superior sex should give the initiative on all occasions.

‘Yes; I should have loitered about here a little longer probably if you hadn't come,’ she says candidly. ‘I came out to get rid of some miserable thoughts, and that can only be done by *thinking them out* in solitude.’

‘You have got rid of them, I hope?’

‘Very nearly,’ she says, smiling as brightly as if miserable thoughts and herself had never met. ‘Now, I'm going for Dolly. When you have got your ferns, you will find us prowling about somewhere near the inn.’

‘If you leave me here alone, I shall fall a prey to miserable thoughts; they make a point of assailing me in solitude. Be merciful and stay with me, and I'll root up a dozen ferns for you.’

There is something far too eager and earnest under his light manner! Darragh feels that if she is to be merciful to him, generous to Dolly, and just to herself, she will have to go at once.

‘Battle with your miserable thoughts and conquer them as I have done,’ she cries out. And then she nods her head in farewell, and sets out at a brisk pace for the inn, hoping, half-unconsciously, that she may gain its friendly shelter unperceived by anyone.

Presently she approaches her bourne, and, as ill-luck will have it, she sees emerging from the doorway and coming steadily to meet her, the beautiful, richly-robed form of the Honourable Mrs. O'Leary.

‘What evil spirit has prompted her to this feat of early rising?’ the girl asks herself in vexation. And then something more than vexation makes her its prey, as the fear that Mrs. O’Leary may discover who has been her (Darragh’s) companion down on the cliffs. ‘But it’s not likely she was up when he started,’ Darragh tells herself reassuringly; and then she tries to make the best of it and disarm suspicion by giving Mrs. O’Leary a cheery greeting, and suggesting that she ought to go down to the nearest cliffs and get the morning sweetness of the ocean’s fresh breath.

But Mrs. O’Leary is one of those women who scent out intrigue even where it does not exist. This romantic isle seems to her to be rife with opportunities for it; and on the spot she unjustly suspects the truth—namely, that Darragh has been with Captain Mackiver by the sad sea waves while Captain Mackiver’s betrothed has been sleeping the sleep of groundless security.

The worst part of the woman’s nature kindles into sympathy at the supposition. That other women should veer from the narrow path and do dishonourable things in Love’s outraged name is pleasant to her for some inexplicable reason, and she inclines favourably to Darragh now that she takes it for granted that Darragh is playing a dangerous and wicked game in seeking to supplant Dolly.

Not that Mrs. O’Leary has any personal ill-feeling towards Miss Annesley; only in default of other and even more reprehensible excitement, she takes interest and delight in the possibility of Darragh’s flag of honour and Dolly’s flag of love both being trailed in the dust.

Accordingly she strives to attach Darragh to herself now with an animated show of interest and expectancy.

‘Are you too tired to take a turn with me before breakfast?’ she says, with sparkling eyes and a bright meaning smile.

‘Not too tired, but I’m going in for Miss Annesley, Darragh says, drawing a long breath that sounds like a sigh, but that in reality is merely an outcome of her suppressed impatience to get away from this woman before any discovery is made.

‘Oh, let Miss Annesley rest ; if her natural inclination for sea breezes and morning air was so weak that she could sleep through such a glorious opportunity of enjoying both, I should certainly not disturb her. Ah ! what lovely ferns ! Where did you get them ?’

Darragh says :

‘Down there,’ rather curtly, and nods very vaguely towards the coast.

‘You should have got some roots ; let us go and dig some up now, will you ? I want to make a fernery in my house that shall be the envy of all Galway. You shall help me with it.’

‘Thank you, I am afraid I can be of no assistance to you,’ Darragh says coldly. The girl’s sense of self-respect and dignity is outraged by the laughing, meaning glances which Mrs. O’Leary is bestowing upon her. ‘Does she guess that Captain Mackiver is down on the cliffs ? Does she imagine I’m bad enough to have had a secret meeting with him on purpose ?’ the girl asks herself indignantly. Then once more saying something about ‘going in for Dolly,’ Miss Thynne walks into the house, leaving the honourable widow gazing after her with a not too well-pleased expression on her fine, fair face.

‘So you give yourself airs of being too good for me, do you, Miss Darragh Thynne ?’ she soliloquizes, with calm vindictiveness ; ‘how do I know that you’re a better woman than I am after all ? You’re not above being in love with your friend’s lover, but you’re too good to wish me to find

you out ; how flurried and anxious she looked when she met me first ! I'll find out " why " before long, I promise Miss Darragh Thynne ; she hasn't been down on the cliffs alone, I know, but I may as well go and find her fellow-sinner out and let him know that I do hold such a fact in the hollow of my hand concerning her ; it may stop him from trying to find out more about me than I want to have known just yet. Bah ! I defy them all !

Meanwhile Darragh has rushed up to Dolly's room and found that Dolly is still sleeping peacefully, happily, unsuspectingly !

' Oh, why didn't I wake her and make her go out with me ? ' Darragh says to herself, as her prophetic soul foresees some of the difficulties that may be brought to pass through over-imagination on the part of Mrs. O'Leary. Then a sudden impulse makes her rouse Dolly, and when Dolly is wide awake and ready for all that the lovely island they are on can offer, Darragh says :

' Dolly, I got up and went out quietly to the cliffs very early this morning—wanting to be alone to be sad and have my sadness all to myself, and to my annoyance Captain Mackiver came down just as I was coming up, and to my greater annoyance that dubious Mrs. O'Leary met me at the door with one of her most dubious expressions as I came in ; if this is put before you to annoy you, you won't let it annoy you, will you, Dolly ? '

' How could I be annoyed ? ' Dolly asks wonderingly. ' Why should I be ? '

' There's no real reason on earth, but Mrs. O'Leary may make a false one ; however, I've done my part to avert unpleasantness. Now shall we go out again ? '

' And join Ronald ? Yes,' Dolly says promptly, but by the time she is ready to go out Mrs. O'Leary and Captain

Mackiver come strolling back, the lady with the choicest ferns in her possession, and with the pleased consciousness that she has fathomed the secret of Ronald's soul, namely, his unhappy love for Darragh Thynne.

She had gone down to the cliffs and told him that she 'had read that he was there in Miss Thynne's eyes.' It was a bold assertion on her part, but she made it trusting to Captain Mackiver being sufficiently subdued by his own sense of wrong-doing to let her remark pass unchallenged.

'And if instead of resenting it he accepts the suggestive compliment he will be more careful how he treats me in future. I shall know something that he won't like to be told to the whole world.'

This is what she tells herself, and probably she is right. At any rate, Ronald comes back to breakfast with the edge taken off his appetite by the conviction he has, that in some way or other Mrs. O'Leary now regards herself, not only as an ally of his, but as a partisan of Darragh's, and as inimical to Dolly Annesley, and truly enough he tells himself that he 'is in an awful coil.'

'You may trust me,' Mrs. O'Leary whispers, with a familiarity that is odious to Darragh, when they next meet, and though Darragh looks at the lady with frank, open, angry disdain, she does not dare to disavow any need of trusting Mrs. O'Leary in words, for the fear she has of calling the attention of the others to the trifle that is being so falsely magnified.

In spite of Mrs. O'Leary's assurance that she 'is to be trusted'—to observe secrecy it is to be supposed—she takes the first opportunity that arises of acquainting Mrs. Annesley with the discovery she has made relative 'to the double game that perfidious Captain Mackiver is playing.'

'Say nothing till he is gone ; he leaves to-night, I under-

stand, and when he is gone break it to your sister-in-law that something has come to your knowledge which convinces you that he will jilt her ; don't let her force you to be too explicit, and don't mention me. She dislikes me already, and would try to undermine me with you, dear, if she knew I had discovered her lover's perfidy.'

'No one will ever undermine you with me,' Marian says enthusiastically. 'I consider that you are proving yourself a true friend ; the Mackivers want Dolly's money, but if she has a spark of self-respect and womanly feeling she won't be married for that only, by a man who insults us all by carrying on with another girl under her brother's roof.'

'It is for you to save her from such a fate,' Mrs. O'Leary says warmly. She has quite made up her mind to oust Captain Mackiver from the Annesley set if possible. In time the mists of uncertainty as to her past may clear themselves away from his mind, and she does, above all things, desire that this past may never be revealed. After all, it is, with her, merely the instinct of self-preservation. It is her intention to shine in London society this season—to become a much-talked-about and photographed beauty ! Shall such a lofty ambition be laid low by a few words from a young man who has more than once mentioned a certain *rue* in Paris in her presence, in which was a wine-shop in days gone, whose success was mainly due to the charms of a beautiful woman who has since then soared into a higher sphere ?

Moreover, she is justified to herself in what she purposes doing on other and less selfish grounds. Captain Mackiver is wavering, if he is not actually false to Dolly ; of so much Mrs. O'Leary is sure. Beyond this she surmises much, and it may be observed that the surmises of such a woman are not of the purest description.

The remainder of the time they spend in Arranmore drags

heavily. Captain Mackiver is undisguisedly in low spirits, as becomes a man who will soon be called upon to take leave of his betrothed. Dolly is infected sympathetically by his dulness, and is, moreover, distraught between his declared determination to come back and marry her in May, and her brother and sister-in-law's strong opposition to that early date being fixed. Darragh is in fitful spirits, which Mrs. O'Leary remarks upon as a certain sign of guilt, and Robert Annesley is fretting over his inability to refund to Dolly that ten thousand pounds which has been melted down in the part purchase and improvement of the Darragh property.

Their homeward-bound sail over the spring-tide sea is not nearly so blithe and happy as their outward-bound one was the preceding day.

'The shadow of your approaching departure has fallen over us all, Captain Mackiver,' Mrs. O'Leary says maliciously, with her sunniest smile, directing attention to Darragh with a glance. She has chosen the moment for making her remark with the supreme discretion of spite. Miss Thynne's attitude as she lounges on the gunwale of the boat, her cheek nestled into her hand, her eyes fixed yearningly on space, is the very embodiment of despondency.

'I'm quiet because I'm tired and worked out with the sea air ; these pleasure trips are always painfully fatiguing. I'm not one of those who bemoan your going, Ronald,' Mrs. Annesley says, rousing up to improve the occasion.

'That's a very inhospitable speech, Marian, only I know you don't mean it,' Ronald replies, making a ghastly effort to be less lugubrious.

'I do mean it ; I consider it ridiculous, if not worse, for anybody but Dolly to look sick and sorry because you're going away,' Mrs. Annesley says animatedly, glaring at poor

unconscious Darragh, and then Mrs. O'Leary neatly points the moral to be deduced by touching Darragh's arm very softly and saying :

'Won't you vindicate your right to lament the departure of our friend? I would have the courage of my opinion if I cared for anyone and that person were going away.'

'It sometimes requires more courage to be silent than to speak; it is so when I feel inclined to answer you, and winnow the chaff from the corn of your words,' Darragh says quietly, and Mrs. O'Leary laughs melodiously, if rather loudly, and retires.

'But you remember in time that "a lie that's half a truth is a harder matter to fight," don't you, Miss Thynne? and so you check your inclination to make me prove my words. You're right; when I am attacked on the delicate subject of anyone I care about, if I *oughtn't* to care about that person, I hold my tongue; I should probably let out worse things concerning myself in my ardour than anyone can invent about me.' And again Mrs. O'Leary laughs her musical noisy laugh, and looks about her with an air of defiance that would be revolting in a less beautiful woman.

When Ronald is saying his last good-bye to Dolly this day a few minutes before he starts, the girl puts her hands on his shoulders and holds her clear, truthful face away from him when he would kiss her.

'Tell me, Ronald, do you still wish to marry me more than any other woman in the world?' she asks softly, and he feels the blood mounting to his brow as he answers :

'My dearest girl, what an absurd question! You are the only woman I wish to marry—more than this, you are the only woman I *will* marry.'

She heaves a sigh of relief.

CHAPTER XIX.

IDLE WORDS.

THERE is little doubt about Darragh being sad and depressed, but she is able to give Dolly good reasons for being so. Lady Killeen has written to her husband's young cousin that it will not be convenient for her to be with them during the season. 'My house will be full,' her ladyship writes, 'for at last Killeen sees the justice of my wanting to have some of my own relations and friends to stay with me, and as Arthur and you are going to commit the folly of marrying, you may as well do it now at once, I should think, and secure a house of your own.'

It is a cruel letter, cruelly intentioned, and cruelly worded, and it wounds as deeply as it is designed to do.

'It means that you will be able to make your home with me when I'm married,' Dolly says, kissing Darragh as she gives back the spiteful letter.

'It means that I have no home,' Darragh says sorrowfully, 'but it means worse than that even. Killeen must have turned against both Arthur and me when he could allow his wife to write to me in this way.'

'The gain will be mine and Ronald's till you are married and have a home of your own,' Dolly says cheerfully, but Darragh shakes her head, and says 'that arrangement can never come to pass.'

'Well, cheer up, Darragh; think! you'll be a happy wife all the sooner perhaps; Mr. Thynne will be sure to want to be married directly he hears that you can't be with the Killeens this season,' and as she listens to these words Darragh cannot repress a shudder.

Altogether the girl's position is a miserable one just now. Mrs. Annesley, who has heartily wearied of her Irish home by this time, is anxious to clear her house of guests before she wings her way to London in May, where she has arranged to take a furnished house for three months with her fascinating friend, Mrs. O'Leary. It is in vain that Robert Annesley protests against this arrangement. His wife has the happy art of not hearing anything that anyone says against any plan she forms. Supported by Mrs. O'Leary's sympathy and counsel she goes on her way just as though he acquiesced in it.

'If you give way to him now he will mew you up here all your life,' Mrs. O'Leary says, 'and you'll bust out and become provincial. I can introduce you to a number of charming people in London, and I'm very much mistaken if you're not the fashion before you've been there a week.'

'Robert vows he can't afford it,' Marian says feebly.

'Oh! nonsense; we get the house for a song, and after all half the expense will be mine; we'll live elegantly for less than you spend at Darragh. I have a French cook; he's such a manager that I can give quite *recherche* little dinners for a mere nothing. Mr. Annesley must come and dine with me before we go over, and my cook will convert him to our schemes of co-operative housekeeping for a few months.'

'I'm sure I can't be grateful enough to you for having planned it,' Marian says effusively, and Mrs. O'Leary assures her that 'this is a mere nothing to what she is prepared to do for her dear friend.'

'For I've a real fancy for you,' she goes on; 'and if I can make your life pleasanter I'll do it, no matter what it costs,' which is quite true, inasmuch as Mrs. O'Leary has a clearly-defined intention in her mind that the Annesleys

shall pay all the bills which may be incurred in the course of their three months' joint-housekeeping in London.

'Take care what you're about with that woman, Marian,' Robert Annesley says, when his wife tells him that Mrs. O'Leary has gone across with 'the intention of taking a furnished house for the season, which they are to share with her.'

'Take care what you are about with that woman ; she'll run you into ruinous expenses before you know where you are. Besides, I doubt her ; she's not sufficiently well authenticated for me to wish to see you mixed up with her.'

'You only say that because she has found out that Ronald Mackiver and that horrid Miss Thynne are playing a double game with your sister,' Marian says tartly.

'I say it because I honestly believe that Mrs. O'Leary is not a good companion for you.'

'Well, you're too late, Robert ; I've authorised her to take a house that we can occupy with her from May till the end of July. I am not going back from my bargain, it would make me look too ridiculous ; besides, I want to go and look for a suitable place for poor mamma and the girls. Now their affairs are settled, it is better they should be in a house of their own again.'

'We could go over and find the house and settle them in it without Mrs. O'Leary's assistance,' he protests. Whereupon Marian almost weepingly defends her ally, and avows that it is essential to her social well-being for the season that she adheres to the alliance.

So it comes to pass that the party at Darragh is broken up less pleasantly than it was in the original programme. Miss Thynne goes back to London first, to some old friends of her father's, who are glad to get the attractive beauty, who may still be the Marchioness of Portbank if she

pleases, to their house, and Robert Annesley and his wife to a pretty little house in Green Street which they are to share for three months with the wondrous widow.

‘And so in consequence of our proper home being broken up your marriage must be delayed till the autumn,’ Marian says to Dolly, and then she adds spitefully, ‘and I have reason to think that Captain Mackiver is very glad of the reprieve.’

‘Marian, that’s cruel, and cowardly as well as cruel, unless you tell me your reasons,’ Dolly says spiritedly.

‘It ought to be enough for you that I have one ; however, I’ll tell you this much, you have been deceived in your friend, Miss Thynne.’

‘Deceived in Darragh ? Oh ! no, no !’

‘Well, if you stubbornly refuse to listen to facts I can’t help you, Dolly ; I shall say no more. I only know that if I were engaged to Ronald Mackiver I would give him to know that he mustn’t be riding in the Row with Darragh Thynne.’

‘He’s not even in London,’ Dolly says injudiciously, and then Mrs. Annesley triumphantly hands her a telegram which has just come from Mrs. O’Leary.

The telegram is as follows :

‘Have secured a bijou house in Green Street. Just in from the Park. Captain M. riding there with Miss Darragh.’

Dolly turns away her head as she hands the telegram back to her sister-in-law ; but not before the latter has seen the tell-tale flush and tears which Dolly cannot suppress.

‘You see he doesn’t keep you posted up in *all* his movements,’ Marian says sneeringly ; ‘how can you be so tame as to stand it ? I should have broken off with Robert without hesitation if he had served me so.’

‘It’s a disgrace to me that I should have felt vexed even for a moment,’ Dolly cries vehemently ; ‘why shouldn’t Ronald ride with Darragh? Who of all my friends do I like so well as Darragh——?’

‘Pray don’t get so excited about the pleasure you feel in Captain Mackiver’s preference for your friend,’ Mrs. Annesley interrupts tauntingly ; ‘for my part I like the girl Darragh as little as I like the place. I wish with all my heart we had never seen or heard of either.’

It is the eve of their departure for England, and Robert Annesley has been engaged with the agent whom he is going to leave in charge of his Irish property all the day. This agent, Mr. Thompson, has been investigating the affairs of his employer’s estate assiduously for the last week, and he has come to the conclusion that Mr. Annesley has been needlessly—almost culpably—generous in having remitted the rents of many of his tenants for the current quarter. In consequence of his having given open expression to this conviction with the hardihood of a man who has never lived in an atmosphere in which it is necessary to conceal an honest opinion, Mr. Thompson is already a much-to-be-disliked man on the Darragh property. And the master who employs him feels for the first time that his popularity among his people depends on other causes than his own upright, kindly course of perfect integrity and confidence.

So it is with considerably lowered expectations of perfect peace and prosperity that Robert Annesley leaves his newly-acquired estate for the first time since his taking up his residence upon it, for this unreasonable, motiveless visit to London, which he foresees will bring neither honour, glory, nor happiness to any one of them.

But Marian is ecstatic about it ; Mrs. O’Leary has uttered

golden words of promise concerning the introductions she can give, and the select circles into which she can introduce Mrs. Annesley. The latter sees visions of herself in a Court train presented to our gracious Sovereign Lady Queen Victoria, or to that lovely representative and daughter-in-law of hers, the sweet Princess of Wales. And once presented, once known to have been made one of that social holiest of holies of the Court, Marian feels that she will be solicited to soar into the highest spheres, and, perhaps, who knows?—take rank as a celebrated beauty.

All these possibilities are before her, she is assured by Mrs. O'Leary, and so her hopes of happiness during the coming campaign are high.

It is a little disappointing to her to find the bijou house in Green Street very small, and decidedly stuffy as to its furniture and arrangements. The rent, too, is not so ridiculously low in their eyes as it is in Mrs. O'Leary's estimation. However, they feel that it would be ungracious to cavil at anything when she has been so kind as to take all the trouble off their hands, and the dinner, which is the work of her man-cook, is certainly an artistic success, and already she is full of plans for their amusement.

'I have a box for Covent Garden to-night, and to-morrow we'll go to Sandown,' she says, when superb soup and fish, cooked out of all semblance to itself and into the form of something so ethereally savoury that those who partake of it feel lifted above ordinary humanity for the time being, is brought in.

'I don't fancy Marian will care for the races,' Mr. Annesley replies; but Marian has set her heart on going into the paddock and being seen by Royalty in a costume which Mrs. O'Leary has ordered and Madame White has arranged.

'I suppose you'll wire to Ronald to go with us, Dolly?'

her brother says, but Dolly tells him, 'No ; Sandown holds no particular charms for her, and as she wants to have a quiet day with the Mackivers as soon as possible, she shall take the opportunity of going to them to-morrow.'

'Captain Mackiver has tastes for the turf, though you don't share them,' Mrs. O'Leary says.

'Not very pronounced ones, I think,' Dolly replies.

'That's what you hope, I suppose ; but I can always tell if a man is horsey at heart,' Mrs. O'Leary rejoins.

'He may be horsey without being turfy,' Dolly laughs. 'I quite decline to be made anxious about Ronald's sporting proclivities.'

'Do you know the people Miss Thynne is staying with at Prince's Gate ?' Mrs. O'Leary asks suddenly, and Dolly says :

'Only by name. I've heard her speak of the Thornes often ; he was an old friend of Darragh's father, Lord Killeen, and Mrs. Thorne is a second wife and a school-fellow of Darragh's.'

'He has two perfect teams this year,' Mrs. O'Leary says, enthusiastically. 'We shall see them at Sandown to-morrow.'

'Do *you* know them ?' Mrs. Annesley asks ; and the handsome puzzle answers carelessly :

'I'll tell you whether I do or not after to-morrow. Mr. Thorne may be inclined to side with my worthless husband ; men have a habit of standing up for one another when matrimonial disputes arise.'

'But, surely, Mrs. Thorne, if she has any womanly feeling, *must* sympathise with you,' Marian says ; and there is something rather stinging in Mrs. O'Leary's laugh as she replies :

'I don't know Mrs. Thorne ; she's a prude and a *parvenue*, and I make a practice of keeping aloof from such people.'

'If she's a prude it's to be hoped she will imbue Miss Thynne with some of her views,' Mrs. Annesley says spitefully. She has no real dislike to the girl, but the name of 'Darragh' is becoming hateful to her, especially when she thinks of what might be before her in town if only she were given a fair chance.

It must be borne in mind that none of these ambitions inflated Marian's soul when she married. They date from the time of her becoming intimate with Mrs. O'Leary.

'Darragh is as incapable of becoming a prude as she is of becoming anything else that's unpleasant or wrong,' Dolly says stoutly.

'How delightful for you that your future husband should so evidently share your views about Miss Thynne,' Mrs. O'Leary says, with a smile that robs her words of their bitterness. She, too, has no real dislike to Darragh, but she fancies that Mrs. Annesley has, and for financial reasons she wishes to please Mrs. Annesley greatly.

The next morning Mrs. O'Leary, in a costume of steel-coloured plush, richly trimmed with steel beads, and Mrs. Annesley, in a twin costume of brown plush and bronze beads, accompanied by Mr. Annesley, start for Sandown, and Dolly goes to the Mackivers'

By the five o'clock post last night she despatched a note to Ronald at Aldershot asking him to meet her to-day at his father's house, and her heart is beating and her cheeks are burning with expectancy, as she stands waiting for admission. For Ronald is very dear to her, and she does long to see him, and to see his love expressed for her, after all the innuendoes to which she has been compelled to listen of late.

But Ronald is not here !

'He will come, of course,' she says buoyantly ; 'he will'

come in late for luncheon, and make us all feel grateful to him for having exerted himself to get here in such good time.'

'He ought to have been here before you,' his sister Mary says decisively; and then his mother adds:

'In *my* time the gentlemen were always before the ladies; but young men are very lax nowadays, and seem to think nothing of keeping the ladies waiting. I suppose now you are in town, my dear, you'll be seeing about your wedding outfit?'

'I don't think I'll get the *trousseau* till I know when we are to be married,' Dolly says, with a slightly heightened colour; and at this Mrs. Mackiver shakes her head, and Mr. Mackiver pulls a long face.

'*That* cannot be settled till your brother is ready with a statement of what he is prepared to do,' the old gentleman says solemnly. 'It seems to me that he would have been doing a far wiser thing if he had stayed over there and looked after things himself on his estate, instead of paying an agent to do that, while he comes over here and wastes money in a set of sham fashionables.'

'So Robert feels himself—I'm sure of that,' Dolly says dejectedly; 'but Marian frets for change and fashion, and Robert is so kind-hearted that he has given way against his better judgment.'

'My husband never gave way to me against his better judgment, and I'm a happier woman for his firmness,' Mrs. Mackiver says. 'If young people would only consent to be guided a little by the example of their elders, a great deal of sorrow and expense would be saved.'

'Dolly's always ready to be guided, mother; you needn't point the moral of her sister-in-law's perversity so strongly to her,' Mary puts in, and then Mrs. Mackiver harks back

to the subject of the wedding outfit, and gives Dolly much sound advice about it.

‘Get Irish linen, Dolly ; it’s the best thing in my opinion that comes out of that country. I have some now that I got when I married, and it’s good and a perfect colour still ; and get it made up by Irish needlewomen if you can.’

‘I’ll obey both injunctions—when I get my *trousseau*,’ Dolly says gaily.

‘That is when your brother remembers his duty to you, and does it,’ old Mr. Mackiver says, frowning a little, and then he adds, ‘It pains and surprises me that Robert Annesley should be wasting his substance in a vain effort to make a show in the fashionable world, instead of defraying a debt of honour to his sister.’

‘I gave it to him freely,’ Dolly says valiantly ; ‘if I never see a penny of it again, I should hold my brother blameless.’

‘Such a sister should have a better brother,’ Mrs. Mackiver says ; and Mary thinks, ‘Such a woman should have a better husband than Ronald will be,’ but she holds her peace, and gives all her mind to the task of making the lagging hours, during which Ronald does not come, agreeable to Dolly.

Ronald does not come, does not even respond to Dolly’s little note of invitation, and in spite of her abstract affection for the Mackiver family, the hours lag heavily. Still Dolly stays on gallantly to the end of the day, taking in information on various household matters from Mrs. Mackiver, and listening with a patient sweetness that touches them, though they impose upon it in the prognostications they utter as to the inevitable ruin that must ensue from Robert’s purchase of Darragh.

‘The end of it will be a drained purse and a bullet through his head,’ Mr. Mackiver says, with the sweet resig-

nation people are apt to display about the evil that is to overtake their friends.

'And that won't be the end of it for Dolly,' Mrs. Mackiver adds ; upon which Dolly remarks that if her brother is to die of a bullet through his head, she shall not very much care what becomes of herself.

'You have Ronald to think of,' Ronald's mother says, and Dolly answers :

'Dear Mrs. Mackiver, however much I think of Ronald, it won't alter the fact that if my brother fails altogether, it will be better for Ronald that I should cease to think of him ; you know that.'

'Dolly will always act properly, whatever her brother or Ronald may do,' Mary Mackiver says, and Dolly's soul yearns towards the giver of this little bit of encouragement. When Dolly reaches home, she finds that the people, who have been to Sandown Races, are rather tired and more than rather cross. That they have not achieved the success they anticipated is very palpable, for they disparage everything.

'I never saw such a priggish set in my life,' Mrs. O'Leary says. 'Your friends were there in great force, Miss Annesley, but they kept quite aloof from us.'

'*My* friends !' Dolly says wonderingly.

'Well, the friends of your friend, Miss Thynne. Mr. Thorne's drag was quite a feature, some said on account of the beauty of the team, others because Darragh Thynne and Lord Portbank were on it.'

'Wasn't Arthur Thynne there?' Dolly asks ; and Mrs. Annesley replies :

'Oh ! yes ; but he didn't seem to count any more than Ronald did. They were both on the drag, but Lord Portbank monopolized Darragh.'

‘Was Ronald—did you see Ronald?’ Dolly exclaims, and Mrs. Annesley answers :

‘Oh! yes; of course, we thought you knew he was there, hearing from him, as you do, constantly, I thought that he naturally would have told you he would be at Sandown—with Miss Thynne.’

‘And the Thornes and Arthur Thynne and Lord Portbank; why don’t you put them all in, Marian?’ her husband says, as he marks and pities his sister’s discomfiture.

‘Well, it does sound better to mention them all,’ Mrs. Annesley says laughingly; and then she adds, with affected magnanimity :

‘I must confess that Darragh looked lovely enough to dazzle any man to-day. *You* must get hold of her dress-maker, Dolly.’

CHAPTER XX.

THE CO-OPERATIVE HOUSEHOLD.

THE co-operative household has existed for a fortnight, and already each one of the Annesleys is heartily tired of the arrangement. But Marian keeps her own counsel still, and makes no outward sign of the sore disappointment under which she is smarting, with respect to the brilliant society into which she expected to be introduced by Mrs. O’Leary. Robert, on the other hand, speaks openly to his wife and sister of his dissatisfaction with the way in which the scheme is being worked out; and Dolly, though she says very little, suffers more than enough on account of her forced intercourse with a woman of whom she is more than doubtful.

They have had a good deal of gaiety of a certain kind. Mrs. O’Leary is rather an adept in the art of keeping

the ball rolling, and during this past fortnight, as private invitations have not been forthcoming, she has contrived to keep up a constant supply of opera and theatre engagements.

It is very different to what Mrs. Annesley has been led to expect, and though she utters no word of complaint, her brow is often clouded, and her spirit greatly vexed. The morning stroll in the Row, the drive in the victoria (which she shares with Mrs. O'Leary) after luncheon, and the theatre or opera in the evening, are not the joys which she panted to taste when Mrs. O'Leary first proposed that they should come to town together.

That gay and careless dame evidently gives no thought to her breach of contract. She drives, dresses, dines, and shops as if these were the sole objects of her life in London. She goes out quite independently of those who are dwelling in the tent with her, and offers no account of herself to them when she comes back. She frequently monopolizes the victoria for the whole morning without any consideration for the lady who hires it with her. And, worst of all her sins of omission, she does not offer to introduce Mrs. Annesley to any one of the titled people whose names ran so glibly off her lips.

A few old friends of the Annesleys, and a few more who knew the Lepells in their palmyest days, invite them to dinner, and with this the list of their social diversions closes. To say the truth, Mr. Annesley is glad of it. Better far that his wife should be dull and disappointed than that she should be drawn into the vortex, and whirled to her own destruction in company with Mrs. O'Leary; for that Mrs. O'Leary is on the high road that leads to ruin intuition tells him strongly, though he knows nothing and can prove nothing against her.

As for the Mackivers, they set their faces sternly against the whole establishment in Green Street. It is bitter in the

extreme to them that Dolly, the girl who may be their son's wife, should be mixed up in this intimate way with a woman whose antecedents are unknown, and whose current career is badly authenticated. But they refrain from snatching the brand from the burning, because of that doubt they have as to the Darragh property, and the safety of Dolly's ten thousand pounds. If this grievous thing should come to pass—that expediency should command the breaking off of the match, then all the better that the intercourse between themselves and Dolly should be restricted now.

‘We shall only feel it the more if it has to be broken off if she comes to us as one of our own now,’ the old lady and gentleman say to one another; and even Mary feels that perhaps it is as well Dolly should not stay with them. But her reason for thinking this has nothing to do with the doubtful state of the Irish property, or the uncertainty as to the ten thousand pounds. Her fears are aroused about her brother's fidelity, not about Dolly's fortune.

As for Ronald, he does not dare to ask himself whether or not he earnestly desires that all things may turn out well, and the marriage come off soon. He is in a state of feverish anxiety about matters that he does not dare to define. And there is more pain to him now than pleasure in the sight of either Dolly or Darragh.

The two girls are in such widely-different circles that they see very little of one another. Darragh has come over once or twice, and clearly given Dolly to understand that Captain Mackiver's meeting with her in the Row and being with her at Sandown were the results of chance, not of arrangement. And this she does in a way that would entirely do away with jealous feeling, if any had existed in the crystal-clear soul of the girl to whom Ronald is engaged.

But after explaining this easily and naturally, Darragh at-

tempts to speak on another subject, and betrays embarrassment at once.

‘I wish something would occur to call your brother back to Ireland,’ she begins; ‘or I wish you would hurry and get out of this at once.’

‘Why?’

‘Dolly, I can’t tell you why exactly; it’s horrible to have to give utterance to hard words about a woman, or to seem suspicious about a stranger; but do *nice* people visit Mrs. O’Leary? Do ladies come here? Does she go to any good houses? Dear Dolly, she’s an adventuress, if ever there was one in this world; and your name will get mixed up with hers.’

‘She knows your friend, Mr. Thorne,’ Dolly replies, not with any definite desire to defend the Honourable Mrs. O’Leary, but simply because she does not know what to think or say about her.

‘Does she say so? Mr. Thorne will not acknowledge her even as an acquaintance; and I know that he laments that Mrs. Annesley drives about with her. You ought not to be here, Dolly dear.’

‘What can I do, and where can I go?’ Dolly says desperately. ‘I hate this life, and I know Robert does, too; but you know how Marian sways him.’

‘Captain Mackiver ought to take you out of it.’

‘Ronald wished to be married this month, but that wasn’t convenient to Robert,’ Dolly says; and then she feels herself led on to tell the story of how the Irish estate was partly bought with her money.

‘And you can’t marry till your fortune is paid back to you?’ Darragh asks sympathetically.

‘The Mackivers think it will be wise to wait till—till Robert can refund it.’

‘The Mackivers are selfish in their prudence,’ Darragh says gravely; then she adds impetuously, ‘Oh! Dolly dear, it sounds absurd for a pauper such as I am to talk of what I *would* do if I were rich, but I never longed for money in my life as I do now when I want it for you.’

‘I could be happy enough without it if Ron——if the Mackivers didn’t make a point of it,’ Dolly confesses. ‘As it is, I must be patient.’

‘Between them they may waste your life away, and mar your happiness. No! I can’t be contented to see you waiting, waiting, on such a forlorn hope as the prospect of your brother making a fortune out of our old place. Leaving the property in the hands of an agent whom they detest is bad enough, but he is throwing away his time and influence and money recklessly here.’

‘And I can’t alter things,’ Dolly says resignedly; ‘but please believe, Darragh, that I am quite happy. While Ronald is satisfied that it should be so, I can wait and hope.’

‘He ought to be a good man and true, you love and trust him so,’ Darragh says heartily; but she has a grievous doubt in her own soul as to his being either of these things since he has known her.

‘If it were not for what the others say and think, I could bear the waiting and the suspense easily enough,’ Dolly says; ‘but there are so many cross-purposes to be endured: the Mackivers dislike this establishment, and will neither come here nor invite Robert nor Marian there, and Marian resents that by talking at me about the Mackivers.’

‘And what part does Captain Mackiver take in this unpleasant game?’ Darragh asks.

‘He can seldom get leave, but when he does come, everyone seems more or less ill at ease. It’s so different to our

happy days at Darragh,' Dolly sighs ; and Darragh turns her head aside for fear of the truth that those 'happy days' were days of trial to her being read in her face.

One of the few friends of the past who 'take up the Annesleys' in these days, is little Mrs. St. John, and at once, without any particular reason for it, a great friendship springs up between the Hon. Mrs. O'Leary and the pains-taking and popularity-seeking authoress.

After the manner of the impulsive order of their sex, these two ladies discover marvellous similarities of thought, feeling, and sentiment in one another. To their natural delight and satisfaction they find out that they have kindred spirits ; that they both like the same styles of music, men, and morality ; that they are both singularly unfortunate in being united to husbands who are not only incapable of appreciating them, but who are such singularly bad specimens of mankind that the marvel is that such superior women as they affirm themselves to be can ever have tolerated, much less married, them. Mrs. St. John, whose 'vocation is work !' and who calls all the world to witness the ardour and perseverance with which she follows it, professes to be fascinated completely by the light, pleasure-loving nature of the lady who avowedly is a butterfly, not a bee. They call each other by pet names and fond diminutives, until Robert Annesley loathes them both for a display of affection in which he puts no faith. Finally Mrs. St. John, who has come up to London to live, now invites 'Queenie,' as she calls Mrs. O'Leary, to go and stay with her, and Mrs. O'Leary goes, leaving the burden of the establishment she has started in Green Street entirely on the Annesleys' hands.

'You keep things going in your own way, and at the end of the term I will pay my share of the expenses,' she says

to Mrs. Annesley, who, though she begins to feel herself to be the victim of a fraud, still strives to keep up the appearance of believing in her honourable friend. Accordingly, Robert Annesley finds himself saddled with Mrs. O'Leary's French cook, the victoria, and the house at a rental that paralyzes his faculties whenever he thinks of it.

In the midst of these troubles and anxieties, a letter comes to him from Ireland which adds materially to both. Mr. Thompson, the agent, writes to resign his situation, having received threatening letters, and seen two graves dug for himself on the Darragh home estate.

'We must go home at once,' Robert Annesley says to his wife. 'My personal influence will set things straight again, I was mad to leave the place.'

'I shall think myself mad if I go back to it till things are more settled,' Marian replies. 'What a blessing that we had all left before their natural ferocity broke out in this way.'

'I shall look upon you as Marian's murderer if you insist upon taking her back there,' Mrs. Lepell puts in solemnly; 'the poor child will soon die of terror, even if she is not shot. If you are weak and rash enough to risk your own life, you have no right to risk hers, and I shall think very badly of you, Robert Annesley, if you say another word about her going.'

'Will you let me go alone, Marian?' he asks

'Will I let you go alone? What a way of putting it,' she says hysterically. 'I don't want you to go at all; you know I hate the place, and dread the people; but if you will run your own head into the jaws of death, you surely don't wish me to run mine in too; and as some one *must* stay in this house for the rest of our term, I shall be doing my duty quite as much by remaining here as by going back to Ireland.'

‘I shall not leave you here,’ he says, rather severely. ‘If you stay behind it must be with your mother; I don’t choose that you shall be associated with Mrs. O’Leary while you are not protected by my presence.’

‘The only thing against her is that she has a bad, selfish husband,’ Marian says sulkily; ‘besides,’ she adds, ‘she isn’t here now: surely you can trust Dolly and me together?’

‘I shall go back with Robert,’ Dolly says quietly, and her brother rewards her with a grateful glance, for he knows that it will cost her something to put the Channel between Ronald and herself.

‘Perhaps it will be as well that you should do so,’ Marian says, catching at the proposal rather eagerly. ‘You get on with the people there; you like them, and have patience to listen to their fairy legends and ghost stories, and to look for their enchanted isles and four-leaved shamrocks; yes, I quite think that, on the whole, it is your obvious duty to go with Robert.’

‘You’re not afraid that Dolly or I may be potted from behind a hedge, then, Marian?’ her husband asks, half jestingly, half in earnest.

‘If you insist upon going to the outlandish place it’s useless for me to protest, or to work myself up into a state of nervous anxiety about you,’ Marian replies petulantly. ‘I’ve objected to Darragh from the first, and I feel that we shall never know real peace or comfort while we own it; if my advice is taken even now, late in the day as it is, I should say sell it.’

‘That is not to be thought of, as things are now; the value of land has gone down immensely in Ireland, during the last few months. No, Marian, I’m sorry for you; you must make the best of it, though, for Darragh will be your home for many a long year to come.’

‘I can’t think how you can bring yourself to speak so

heartlessly and ungenerously,' Mrs. Lepell says indignantly, to the son-in-law to whose wise judgment and generosity she is indebted for the small but sufficient little income she now enjoys. Then she goes on to tell him that if her poor dear husband were still alive, and the majority of things were widely different to what they are, he would not heartlessly propose to take her dear child into exile among a lot of savages, who would first rob her of all she possessed, and then shoot her for not having more to give them !

'Marian has taken me for better and for worse,' he says, in reply to this tirade. 'If I thought there was danger in taking my wife and sister back to Darragh I would make a sacrifice, and leave them here ; as it is, I am persuaded that we are better together, and that we shall be better there than here.'

'Just as Mrs. O'Leary expects her friend, Lady Courteney, up,' Marian grumbles ; 'a woman who moves in the best society, and who is quite ready to present me.'

'I don't like Mrs. O'Leary well enough to wish to know any of her friends, Marian ; and rather than see you in the "best society" through her interest and introductions, I'd plunge into wholesale low life with you for the rest of my days. Besides, who is this Lady Courteney?—a semi-detached wife, probably ; for we never hear of her husband.'

'Probably not, as he has been in his grave for years,' Marian retorts ; and then she goes on to observe that she feels it to be her duty to stay and look after this house until their term of joint occupancy with Mrs. O'Leary expires.

'It would be a little too capricious and unjust to suddenly leave her in the lurch, simply because the latent savagery of your Irish tenantry has broken loose,' she says ; and he, finding that she is bent on remaining here, and feeling that if he puts a pressure on her inclinations she will make his work at Darragh more difficult by her prejudices and

caprices, consents at last that she shall remain, provided her mother comes to stay with her.

On the morning of the day of their departure for Ireland the brother and sister find themselves compelled to discuss the question of Dolly's marriage with old Mr. Mackiver and his son.

'I have said that I would never put my foot into this house that you share with a woman who makes such a mystery of her life, that your wife and your sister are compromised by her, Robert,' the old gentleman says severely; 'but at Ronald's earnest request I have broken my word; my son wishes me to tell you that the marriage must take place in June.'

'And I tell you that it is impossible unless Ronald will allow the matter of Dolly's loan to me to stand over for a time,' Mr. Annesley replies, in a harassed tone that goes to Dolly's heart.

'If Ronald agrees to such unbusiness-like injustice he will marry without my consent,' Mr. Mackiver says stiffly; then he goes on with warmth: 'Robert Annesley, can you reconcile it to your conscience to tamper with the fortune and happiness of the orphan sister who has been left to your care? Can you justify your current course of lavish expenditure while you are deferring her happiness indefinitely? Did you understand me to say from Ronald that the marriage must take place in June?'

'I answered that last question just now; the others I do not feel called upon to answer. If Ronald, for some reason of his own, wishes to break his engagement with my sister, neither she nor I will try to hold him to it.'

'You have no right to speak of such a possibility; the suggestion is an insult to me,' Ronald says, but it is his honour, not his heart, that is wounded, Dolly feels.

'Stop,' she says, and all her gentle womanly pride comes to her aid, and enables her to speak very firmly : 'You will acknowledge that I at least have the right to offer to release you, Ronald, and I do it, for I feel that, however much you may care for me, still you love some one else better.'

She looks straight into his eyes, as she says this, with those brown truth-telling eyes of hers, and he cannot utter a gallant lie to her.

'So you have distrusted me too ?' he says humbly, and the girl shakes her head, and with sorrowful wisdom tells him :

'Never ! until this minute, when I saw that you distrusted yourself.'

His old father looks at him with pained amazement ; Dolly's brother regards him with angry, inquiring eyes, but Ronald has nothing to say for himself. He has fallen, fallen for ever he feels, in Dolly's eyes and estimation, and what the others think of him is a matter of but little moment.

But through all his self-abasement there runs a vein of passionate joy. He is free now to—think of Darragh !

This is all he dares to purpose to himself at present. He knows how Darragh will reproach him, despise him perhaps, for his defalcation to Dolly ; he knows how the loyal-hearted Irish girl will loathe him for his want of fealty to her friend ! But, though he knows all this, he is comparatively happy, for he is a man free to think of her now, and she is a woman, and he can wait.

There are few positions in life more painful and embarrassing to either the ordinary man or woman than that of being in the society of the one to whom he or she has been 'engaged' immediately after the engagement has been broken off. In this case of Ronald and Dolly the pain and embarrassment are all the greater on account of the presence of the father of the one and the brother of the other.

But Dolly is equal to the occasion.

‘Ronald,’ she says, ‘we’re good true friends still, remember that always, and if *that one* you love better than you ever loved me holds back on my account, tell her I want your happiness, dear—tell her I *want* it.’

CHAPTER XXI.

‘I HAVE LOST THEM BOTH’

IN the course of the few days that intervened between the breaking off of Dolly’s engagement and her departure for Ireland with her brother, the girl had to hear many hard things said of Ronald.

Even her brother—the brother who after all is the indirect cause of the crisis—did not spare Captain Mackiver.

‘If you ever waste a thought on that treacherous prig after this I shall be awfully disappointed in you, Dolly. He has shown us clearly that it was your money he wanted and not yourself. And as he couldn’t handle the money at once, he cooled off in the most heartless and insulting way.’

‘Nothing will ever make me think that Ronald is mercenary,’ Dolly replies. Then she adds, with an effort, ‘It’s quite bad enough to feel that there was something wanting in myself—something that he couldn’t dispense with in the woman who could keep his love ; but it would be worse still for me to feel that I have been loving him all this time for qualities he didn’t possess.’

‘I wish you would show a little more spirit about it,’ Marian puts in. ‘Extenuating his meanness and falseness is not womanly, to say the least of it.’

‘Perhaps it will be more womanly to say nothing about

him, Marian,' Dolly answers. 'Let us both agree to do that; and while you keep your part of the bargain I will keep mine.'

'That's the worst of being jilted; it sours a girl, and makes her so ill-tempered with her own people,' Mrs. Annesley says appealingly; and then she goes on to remark that, willing as she is to drop the subject, there is one part of it that she cannot forget, and must speak of, and that is, 'Darragh!'

'What has Darragh to do with it?' says Dolly, as calmly as she can.

'I think you will find she has everything to do with it. Mr. Thynne was dining last night with Mrs. St. John and Mrs. O'Leary, and when they asked about his marriage, he quite evaded the subject as if it were painful to him. Putting two and two together is not evidence, I know; but you must allow that it is odd, to say the least of it, that just as Captain Mackiver throws you over, Miss Darragh should be preparing to break with Mr. Thynne.'

'There you go, Marian, jumping at a conclusion you have not the shadow of a reason for coming to,' her husband says, in vexed tones, for he sees that the limit of Dolly's endurance has been reached, and that the girl will either wrathfully resent these attacks or break forth into tears at the injustice and cruelty of them.

'I don't know what you call having no reason for coming to such a conclusion,' Marian persists. 'I only repeat what Mrs. O'Leary told me; and she's a very clear-sighted woman. Why, she saw that Captain Mackiver was tired of Dolly as long ago as that day at Arranmore.'

But it is after all the inevitable meeting with Darragh Thynne that Dolly dreads most. She will not shirk it, she will not even defer it, but none but her God and herself

know how she dreads hearing from Darragh herself that she is less staunch in her friendship than Dolly has always believed her to be. So, though she writes a letter, begging Darragh to come and see her before she starts for Ireland, she shrinks from the meeting as from something that may inflict actual anguish upon her.

‘Darragh shall not come unprepared,’ the girl tells herself honourably. Therefore she winds up with these words, which are the hardest she has ever been called upon to pen :

‘I believe it will give you pain to hear that my engagement is broken off : Ronald is not to blame. I feel sure that he tried to go on loving me, and that he suffers because he has failed to do so.’

Darragh is standing in her habit and hat ready to go out riding with the Thornes when she gets this letter, and her first impulse is to give up the ride and go to Dolly. But second thoughts prevail, for her second thought is :

‘I had better keep my appointment with Arthur. I had better do nothing that he can construe—or have construed for him—into forgetfulness or a slight.’

She is steeped in an atmosphere of inexpressible sadness as with the Thornes she turns into the Row presently. Whatever may be in her heart about Ronald Mackiver, *this* is in her head and her mind about him : that he has been false, cowardly, and cruel, in severing his engagement with generous, patient, nobly-forgiving Dolly.

‘I will never forgive him. I will never soothe him by a sign of my guilty fondness for him. I will never forget the wrong he has done to Dolly,’ Darragh promises herself ; and the next minute, before she is joined by Arthur Thynne, who is always rather unpunctual, she sees Captain Mackiver eaning on the rails a few yards ahead of her.

It is impossible for her to cut him, for the Thornes would marvel at, and require an explanation of, such an act. It is difficult to pass him by with a cool nod when he manifests such an imploring desire for her to stop and speak to him. Moreover, the matter is taken out of her hands, for Mr. Thorne, with the words—'Hallo! here's Mackiver,' pulls up, and his wife faces her horse round after him, and Darragh finds herself hemmed in by her friends close to the rail against which he is leaning.

And while she is sitting there powerless, in close proximity to him, refraining from a word or a look towards him, but showing in her face that she is desperately conscious of his presence, Mrs. St. John and Mrs. O'Leary ride by and then draw up and speak to her with an assumption of taking it for granted that she is delighted to see them, as they are to meet with her.

'And I see another old friend of mine too,' Mrs. O'Leary says, bowing with exaggerated graciousness, as she looks Mr. Thorne full in the face.

'I do not recognise an old friend in you,' that gentleman says, with a stern stiffness about which there can be no mistake, and even Mrs. O'Leary looks abashed as she inclines her head in general farewell, and rides on.

'Did *you* make a mistake, Queenie, or has that gentleman made one in forgetting you?' Mrs. St. John asks purringly, with an innocent expression, and an inward intense appreciation of the situation.

'He has made a mistake,' Mrs. O'Leary says bitterly—'one that he shall rue or pay for.'

'You see Captain Mackiver is not long in being on with the new love,' Mrs. St. John says; 'poor dear Mr. Arthur Thynne is to be left to wear the willow, and to speak and write eloquently about his country's cause unaided by Miss

Darragh's sympathy any more, that is evident ; and he is so clever, and has such a career before him.'

'You can console him, Gem !'

'Ah ! that might be possible if Mr. St. John were to die,' the lady says laughingly ; 'but, like all bad husbands, he's remarkably healthy, and takes great care of himself.'

'There is the Divorce Court !'

'Ah ! yes ; but freedom is only obtained in that way by the rich and unworthy. I am neither ; I am only a poor little hard-working woman, and an ill-used wife.'

'Well, you're better as you are, busy and quite independent,' Mrs. O'Leary says with heart-felt weariness. 'If I could only occupy myself in writing and forget things in it I could be happy too.'

'And here is Arthur Thynne himself,' Mrs. St. John cries ecstatically, as the young Irishman rides up to them. 'Yes, we know what the attraction is at the other end !' she goes on with what she considers an arch air ; 'but let the beautiful Miss Thynne wait for once while a poor humble little woman thanks you for your splendid generous criticism on a work that she has really striven earnestly to render worthy.'

'You needn't thank me for a candid expression of opinion,' the gallant young reviewer says flatteringly. Then he remembers that he did not read the book, and that his notice of it dealt in safe generalities, and hopes fervently that she will not pursue the subject and lead him on to make confession of his perfidious politeness.

But Mrs. St. John is far too clever to do this. It is her aim, and a very good one too, to stand well, and look well, and be well-reputed for all that she does, and says, and writes. This being the case, she is far too wary to set snares for others that may trap her own feet. Accordingly, now

she goes on to speak more of the review than of the novel reviewed, and as her praise of the former is unstinted, Mr. Thynne finds her a remarkably agreeable, discriminating, and clever little woman.

'Your review shows that you have the *real* critical spirit,' she goes on animatedly; 'and you teach quite as much as you condemn or praise. All that you do, you do with such a delicate appreciation of the author's intention.'

'I quite appreciated yours, at any rate,' he says truthfully, for his thought as he glanced hastily at the work under discussion was that her intention had been to make up three volumes of no matter what, and that she had fulfilled it.

'It is such encouragement in the laborious path of literature to be sympathized with and understood by men who lead the thought of the day,' she says enthusiastically, turning to Mrs. O'Leary, who is getting a little tired of a flattery tournament in which she has no part.

'I shall always take care that you are well looked after in papers in which I have any influence,' he says, thinking it is quite time that he should refer to Darragh. But Mrs. St. John has her grip on him, and does not mean that he should go yet.

'You know my speciality, and point it out so prettily,' she says, disregarding his desire to pass on, and reining her own horse into its slowest walk. 'You understand that I have made a study of society, that I have not gone into it carelessly and described it superficially, as the manner of some is, but that I have studied it; it has been ambitious work, but I feel that I have not fallen short of my ambition, now that *you* say that it is realised.'

So she goes on complimenting herself and him with the ease and facility of a practised hand. And Mrs. O'Leary rides by her side, listening, and laughing to herself, and

arranging a good little story to tell of Mrs. St. John when the bond between that lady and herself shall be finally broken, and the one be no longer useful to the other.

But now they meet the group—the Thornes and Darragh—and Arthur Thynne, unconscious of the shell which has recently been thrown by Mr. Thorne, takes a lively and cordial leave of the two ladies whom he has been escorting, and joins the trio, who seem very solemn and dull by comparison.

‘Charming women, those are, and such friends, too! You don’t often see a couple of pretty women so devoted to one another as Mrs. St. John and Mrs. O’Leary seem to be,’ Mr. Thynne observes confidently to his betrothed and her friends. Then, perceiving that the glances sent after the pair he is speaking about are not those of rapturous admiration, he adds :

‘You don’t say you don’t like them, now? Mrs. O’Leary is a grand creature, I think! A second Helen—she’d fire another Troy; but Mrs. St. John is one of the most simple-minded, kind-hearted little women I ever met with; her gratitude for any trifling service a fellow can render her in literature is tremendous—really, something tremendous.’

‘I don’t like the idea of a woman being “tremendously grateful” for a decently good notice of one of her books; if it deserves it, it deserves it, and extravagant gratitude is out of place; and if it doesn’t deserve it, she knows you’re a humbug for giving it, and merely flatters you by a display of humble thankfulness for what she must think you are weak to give.’

‘You don’t like Mrs. St. John, Darragh?’ Mr. Thynne says, as if he were amused and surprised at the idea; ‘funny it is that women never like another woman who goes a little

beyond them ; you are intolerant to her because she takes her own line—lives her own life——'

'I am not intolerant to her, Arthur ; I'm impatient with her for garnishing what is real about her with such a lot of unreality ; and I'm intolerant to myself to-day ; I feel that there is something frivolous and unreal about me, too ; here I am, a moneyless girl with a real sorrow at my heart, riding a borrowed horse and shamming to be rich and happy and successful when I'm neither one nor the other.'

The cousin lovers have dropped behind their friends as Darragh says this, and something in the genuine mournfulness of her tone rings truly on Arthur Thynne's sensitive ear and light heart.

'My darling ! What is your sorrow ?' he asks tenderly ; 'my dear Darragh, if we are not rich—and we never shall be that—we are surely happy in one another.'

Then she tells him about the broken engagement.

'It's not only for Dolly that I grieve,' she says, 'it is better for her to be free in time from a man who hadn't the stuff in him to conquer his fickleness ; but I grieve for him also. Ronald Mackiver isn't the man to sink in his own estimation without feeling his degradation keenly.'

'Perhaps he hasn't sunk in it,' Mr. Thynne suggests buoyantly.

'Then if he hasn't I sorrow for myself more than I can express, for I have been horribly deceived in him,' says Darragh, with a look in her eyes that makes Mr. Thynne feel that there can be but little good in a man in whom Darragh has been deceived—if she has once thought well of him.

Meanwhile Ronald Mackiver has been standing against the railings hoping, against the dictates of honour and conscience, for one more sight of Darragh.

'She knows it already, and hates and despises me for what I wouldn't forgive in another fellow,' he tells himself as Darragh passes him again with averted eyes. 'I have lost them both for ever.'

He is constantly thinking now how good Dolly is, how generous and gentle, and how entirely devoted she has been to him! If only he could have made her happy! If only money matters had gone straight and 'his people' had not interfered, and he had not been given the opportunity of letting it appear that his heart had failed! Even now, desperately as he loves Darragh, the woman whose good opinion he values in exact proportion as she despises him for what he has done, or allowed to be done—even now he would marry Dolly if he could!

Ay, Dolly if he could!—the good forbearing sister, the nobly reliant girl!—Dolly, who to a man worthy of a good wife will be a perfect one. But it may not be, and—

'I have lost them both,' he mutters, as Darragh passes him again, not with averted eyes this time, but with a look in them that an angel might give to a sinner who has *nearly* been saved.

The meeting between the two girls at a later hour this day is very sweet, though rather sad. They are both truthful, and they are both brave; accordingly they face facts, however hard those facts may be to be faced, at once.

'It is you he loves, Darragh,' Dolly says; 'and you are not all the world to Mr. Thynne as you are to poor Ronald. Don't be angry with me for pleading for him.'

'Oh, Dolly! how we should both have loved him if he had kept up to his own mark,' Darragh replies. 'As it is, you pity, and I——'

'No, you don't—you can't despise him,' Dolly says sturdily; 'and yet you are more likely to do it than I

am, for you don't half know yourself—you can't imagine what a temptation you are to a man, whereas I *do* know you, and can imagine what you are to him.'

'Dolly, Dolly, do you know that I'm the one—and love me still?' says Darragh, with a sob that is eloquent, so fully does it speak of her self-reproach about this matter, which is both her glory and her shame.

'I think I must have known it all along,' Dolly says; 'but I couldn't make up my mind to bring it close to me by confessing it, for I knew how it would hurt us all three if once I allowed that Ronald could be wrong.'

'And he is wrong—so wrong!'

'And you must help to set him right, Darragh.'

'So I will—heaven helping!—but not in the way you mean,' the Irish girl says fervently.

CHAPTER XXII.

CHANGE OF FEELING.

BEFORE starting for Ireland, for that fatal Darragh which has been the cause of so much sorrow to her already, Dolly goes to see and to say good-bye to Ronald's father and mother.

Deeply as the girl sorrows over the loss of Ronald's love, bitterly as she deplores her own proved inability to keep him true and fast, she cannot by any means—nor does she attempt to do it—detach her interest and affection from the Mackiver family. Ronald and herself are parted through force of circumstances, and partly through what her nature will not allow to be Ronald's fault. But she has no feeling

of indignation, or resentment, or even embarrassment concerning him, and consequently she has none concerning his family. To her the broken engagement is a subject of deep pain, but she regards it as being irremediable as death, and, like death, there is about it neither disgrace nor dishonour ; nothing but pure sadness.

This being the case, she goes to the Mackivers without hesitation or doubt, and receives a 'chill.'

Poor girl ! her heart is sore for her own sorrows and for the sorrows of others, for by this time she is conscious of, and keenly alive to, the complications which have arisen in her brother's affairs ; consequently, she is peculiarly liable to receive a chill that is not designed for her.

Mary, the brave, strong sister, meets her heartily as ever, without any of that aggressive heartiness which is meant to show the one for whom it is displayed that a special call is felt to show it, but honestly, with the same intention and expression as have always been in her heart and mind for Dolly.

In his sister's estimation Ronald's conduct is pitiful. That he should have shown himself so weak and wavering to the girl who loves him so as to compel her to release him is a fault and folly for which Mary Mackiver can find no excuse, and has scarcely any toleration. If the young pair had agreed to separate for a time, to defer their marriage, but still keep the betrothal vows, until such time as Dolly's fortune could be restored to her, Mary would have applauded their wisdom and encouraged them in their course. As things are, the sister pities him, but finds something despicable in him.

But the old people, grieved as they are that affairs should have taken such a turn as to necessitate the rupture of the engagement, feel more sorrow than anger at their son's part

in it. According to their ideas, Ronald has acted prudently and Dolly sagaciously in breaking off the engagement, which was made when they all thought that Dolly was the actual possessor of ten thousand pounds. Now that they find these thousands are invested in Irish property, and that Dolly is not actually in possession of ten thousand pence, 'circumstances,' they feel, 'have been against the happiness of the young pair;' but additionally they feel that it behoves the young pair to make the best of dissolution of projected partnership, and 'unquestionably,' they say to one another, 'it will be unwise to encourage anything like accidental meetings between Ronald and Dolly, or hope on Dolly's part.'

The fact is, Mrs. Mackiver holds rather strong views on the subject of elective affinity. According to her a girl is wanting in modesty who loves a man unless he distinctly asks her to do so, and the girl becomes bold and almost unsexes herself, if she does not drop all semblance of the interest that is more than friendship in the man to whom she has been, but is no longer, engaged.

So when poor Dolly makes her appearance before them, full of sorrow and tenderness, the well-meaning but rather stiff old pair harden themselves, and give her to understand that evil-minded people may construe what she has done into 'running after Ronald.'

This is not said to her in so many words, but it is indicated, and Dolly feels it.

'I am going off to Ireland with Robert,' she says, with a sparkle in her voice. She has lost Ronald, but she has not lost everything! Among other trifles, for instance, she has not lost her habit of trying to make things pleasant for other people.

'I am glad to hear you *are* going away, my dear,' Mrs.

Mackiver says, dolefully kissing Dolly, and pressing the girl's hands with a look that seems to say that she is not sure whether Dolly is a criminal or a victim.

'We are going to see about things at Darragh,' Dolly says valiantly ; ' the agent is unlucky enough not to be liked, and Robert feels that if there is any risk to be run, or dangers to be faced, he is the one to run the one and face the others.'

' Well ! ' Mrs. Mackiver says meditatively, ' he's right in a measure. But it seems to me that you're bearing the brunt of it as well as your brother ; and though, of course, it's only just that you know what is doing on the property that your money is invested in, still, I don't like the idea of your being rash or foolhardy. Couldn't you go away into some nice, out-of-the-way English country place, or even keep quiet in London for a time ?'

' Why should I do either ? ' Dolly asks, in amazement.

' Ah ! well, my dear, if *you* feel nothing about seeing your friends and hearing their remarks, I certainly am not the one who ought to try and make you do so ; but in my young days it was felt that a young lady couldn't be too particular, and couldn't keep herself too quiet or avoid observation too much, if anything unfortunate happened to break off her engagement.'

' I can't hate or dislike everyone and run out of reach of my friends and duties, because Ronald and I are unhappily parted. Poor Ronald ! how it would hurt him if I did,' Dolly says earnestly.

' My dear Dolly ! I have almost stood in the place of your mother, and I must tell you now that it would shock me to hear a daughter of mine speak of the man who *might* have been her husband, but *is not* to be her husband, by his Christian name ; it is too familiar—it is not maidenly !'

'We are friends still!' Dolly gasps. She is shocked at the idea of unmaidenly conduct being imputed to her, but she is much more shocked at the idea of being severed so utterly from the one to whom she is in heart so closely united still.

'Friends! there can be no friendship between a young man and a young woman, my dear,' Mrs. Mackiver says; and her husband endorses her sentiment by a wise shake of the head.

'No friendship between us! Why, Ronald will always be the dearest and best friend to me, and what should I be if I didn't give the warmest and most loving friendship of which I am capable to the man I once hoped to marry?' Dolly cries out, with a disregard of conventional reticence on the subject that Mrs. Mackiver is very sorry to see.

'That's just what makes it such a delicate matter,' Ronald's mother says, stroking her black silk apron down into more regular folds. 'In my young days, if a young lady was unfortunate enough to have been publicly engaged to a gentleman, and anything occurred to prevent the marriage, she and her friends would do their utmost to put mountains and streams between herself and the man.'

'There are not mountains and streams enough in the world to entirely separate me from your son,' Dolly says gravely. 'I should despise myself if I could unlove in such a fashion, and in your heart you would despise me too; you would feel that I had pledged myself readily to form the tenderest ties with one whom I was ready to renounce at a moment's notice. I have not been Ronald's wife, but I feel as if I were his widow.'

'And we love you as if you were our daughter,' the old mother, who is touched in spite of her strong views of what is correct, says fervently; and then Dolly, feeling that she

has melted her audience, and that she is on the verge of a breakdown herself, takes her leave.

Poor child ! It is hard for her to go out of this house where she has been as a child of it, feeling that Ronald's parents will not allow that she is one of them any longer. His father accompanies her to the door, kisses her solemnly on her aching brow, and says :

'Good-bye, my dear girl. This is a bitter trial for us all, and it has been laid upon us chiefly by my old friend's son —by the brother who ought to have been your safest guardian.

'It is a bitter trial, but the money is not at the root of it,' Dolly says, in tones of full conviction. 'Let us tell the truth : Ronald has left off loving me, that is all ; he has not been mercenary and calculating ; the want of the money has not changed him.'

Then Mary comes quietly up and puts her arms round Dolly, and presses the girl to her good, strong heart.

'I am your sister still?' Mary Mackiver questions, and Dolly says quietly :

'Yes ; we can't undo that, happily.'

'But for Dolly's own sake, for her womanly dignity, and because of the eyes of the world being upon her keenly just now, she must keep away from us, and not seem to be seeking Captain Mackiver,' Mrs. Mackiver says, bustling forward into the hall. The old lady's heart is full of kindly feeling towards the girl who was to have been her son's wife ; but she likes things to be done, not only decently and in order, but with the view of looking well in the eyes of decorous people.

Dolly laughs sadly as she looks round to nod a last farewell.

'Good-bye ; the eyes of the world won't see very much

amiss in me for coming to you,' she says affectionately. 'And as for Ronald, he will always be to me the man for whose happiness I'm most anxious in the world ; and, by-and-by, I will tell his wife so, and she will be glad.'

'My dear, you have no right to take it for granted that Ronald will forget you, and marry another lady,' Mrs. Mackiver protests.

But Dolly only smiles at this, for she knows what Darragh is, and how he loves her.

There is a little confusion and disturbance in the household in Green Street just now on account of a habit Mrs. O'Leary has of being slack with her payments. That broad-minded woman has done everything with an open hand in the way of organizing and ordering the establishment, but up to the present time she has forgotten to pay her share—or, indeed, any part—of the expenses. Consequently Mrs. Annesley finds herself continually called upon to disburse ; and the requirements of the French cook being many, Mr. Annesley finds the cheques he has to draw are altogether out of proportion to the balance at his banker's.

His patience gives way just as he is starting, when Marian comes to him with a long face and a longer bill from the livery stables which has supplied the victoria and brougham.

'You had better settle this, Robert,' she says, in an injured tone. 'The man has sent it in several times, and is disposed to be desperately insolent, simply, as far as I can see, because *you* are an Irish landowner, and Mrs. O'Leary has an Irish name.'

He takes up the bill and glances at it hastily.

'You have not been having riding-horses?' he asks.

'No.'

'Well, the account is made out against *me* entirely ; and

here, for the last three weeks, are two ladies' horses and a groom down daily "to Mrs. Annesley."

'Oh! it must be some mistake,' Marian says, snatching at it hastily; but in her heart she realises the truth. Her Honourable Mrs. O'Leary has been hiring horses in her name, making Marian, in fact an unconscious sharer in all her pleasures and expenses.

'I can't stay to argue the point now, but when I come back to fetch you out of this den of thieves I shall have a word or two to say that Mrs. O'Leary won't like to hear, I fancy,' he says hurriedly. Then he kisses his wife, entreats her to be 'prudent about that woman,' shouts to Dolly to get into the cab, and is off once more to that Irish estate which has already, like Dead Sea fruits, turned to ashes on his lips.

'Dolly,' he says, very tenderly as they drive along, 'a girl one shade less good than yourself would goad me into selling Darragh and keeping Ronald Mackiver up to the scratch.'

'Not if that girl knew that Ronald Mackiver had lost his love for her,' Dolly says.

'Nonsense; it's the money. Don't think that I am not fully alive to my faults, dear. My sin in using your fortune is coming home to me in having a non-rent paying tenantry, and a sister ill-treated by a man; and yet, do you know, Dolly, keenly as I feel all this, I'll stick to Darragh through everything.'

'So will I—to both the Darraghs,' Dolly answers earnestly; and her brother knows that he has an efficient aid in her, sorely as she is suffering about that private trouble of hers which she is hugging to her heart.

The day after they leave, Mrs. Annesley—nerved to the task by the consciousness that she is responsible for Mrs. O'Leary's ways and means to Robert—goes with the auda-

cious bill in her pocket to call on the lady who has lured her into co-operative house-keeping.

To her surprise she finds that Mrs. O'Leary has gone abroad, and that Mrs. St. John is merely guardedly civil.

'Important business has taken my friend abroad. When she returns she will, I have no doubt, settle these trifling bills,' Mrs. St. John says; and then she adds, 'if they are hers; but it is always so difficult to decide who has had what, or to draw the line straight between the two who share the expenses of a household.'

'Only in the case of this bill there is no difficulty; she has had riding-horses, and I have had none,' Mrs. Annesley says, waxing a little warm.

'Ah! I really know nothing about your private arrangements, or hers either, for that matter; but as an old acquaintance—*may* I say an old friend?—I would strongly advise you not to quarrel for a trifle with Mrs. O'Leary.'

'I should never think of quarrelling with anyone about money,' Mrs. Annesley says, with an air of regarding money as mere dross which does not impose upon Mrs. St. John for a moment.

That astute little dame knows that Mrs. Annesley's heart is filled with fury anent this bill; and, for a reason best known to herself, she is rather glad that some one should be furious enough with Mrs. O'Leary to expose her; for 'Theresia' and 'Gem' have found flaws in one another, after the manner of weaker women. They have clashed about a matter which each declares to be 'trifling,' and at the same time which each is intensely interested in—for the time. And this matter is nothing more than the attentions which Arthur Thynne freely lavishes on both alike, for the one woman pretends that she can help him in his literary

career, and the other lovelier one pretends that she 'is interested in it because she is fond of him.'

Fond of him ! Fond of Darragh's acknowledged lover ! And he openly shows that he is gratified by the exhibition of such fondness.

For his love for Darragh is merely a clinging to the habit of his life. It has always seemed to smooth things for him that he should show affection for Darragh, and to her he owes the adoption of his career of patriotic politician. Moreover, she is his cousin, and she is very fair.

But it is an unjust freak of Fate's that they two should be linked by honour, while the love that would make such linking the holiest union is so light and so easily set aside.

Now that Mrs. O'Leary has gone away, Arthur Thynne has a recurrence of very warm feeling for his betrothed, for it is a necessity to the young member to have an enthusiastic auditor now and again. Something, however, seems to have come between Darragh and that love of country which has hitherto been so unflagging ; and at length he complains of this larger interest to Mrs. St. John.

'Darragh has exhausted her ardour, it seems to me. I was telling her of some arrests that were made in Dublin yesterday, and she said she had lost all sympathy with the Fenians ; they were ruining the cause. Now, that's not like Darragh. What has come to her?'

'A love that is nearer and stronger than love of country, I should say,' Mrs. St. John says, smiling a little maliciously. Then she puts on a consoling air, and adds, 'Never mind, Arthur ! If Miss Thynne falls away from her fealty, you are still loved by a woman who would make sacrifices for you which Darragh Thynne has not the courage to make.'

'Do you mean Mrs. O'Leary?' he asks ; and Mrs. St. John half shakes her head and sighs.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FATE IS AGAINST DARRAGH.

It is a glorious day, and the Hampshire hills are alive with a gay and glittering mass, for a royal review is being held between Bagshot and Camberley, on Turf Hill.

The Queen is here, looking her royal matronly best, in an open carriage drawn by four superb bay horses, heralded by outriders in scarlet, with the Sandhurst cadets forming her guard of honour, and the daughter who is always with her by her side. Close to her is the most distinguished-looking woman in England—the beautiful Princess who looks young enough to be the sister of her handsome sons.

All the celebrated beauties are dotted about in landaus or dashing little victorias, and each one commands her full meed of admiration from the well-dressed, fashionable throng who have given themselves the healthy change of coming to see the march past. But that on which the interest is chiefly concentrated is the drag drawn by a chestnut team full of pluck and pride and beauty, and driven by the Marquis of Portbank.

For on this drag is Darragh Thynne.

It is sorely against her will that she is here, seeming to countenance the current report which persists in giving her to Lord Portbank. But the Thornes are her best friends in these days, and their wishes and prejudices have to be consulted. They are not snobs, neither are they careless of Darragh's tastes and wishes. Still they have a prejudice in favour of the 'upper crust,' and they think it rather idly capricious of Darragh to wish to debar them of the privilege of being driven by Lord Portbank and seen by society on Lord Portbank's drag.

Strangely enough, too, Arthur Thynne has been most urgent in his entreaties to the girl to accede to the wishes of the friends with whom she is staying, and show herself on Lord Portbank's drag.

'It's you he wants, not Mrs. Thorne; we all know that,' he says to her. 'And if you don't go Portbank will be glum, and poor Mrs. Thorne will be robbed of half the glory she is anticipating. Go, Darragh, go by all means; people will think you're engaged to him; but I know better, so what does it matter?'

'I should have thought you would rather people didn't think that, Arthur.'

'Oh! I'm quite superior to any idle, jealous folly of that sort, I assure you,' he says, laughing. 'And I rather like to see Portbank in the character of my unsuccessful rival. In justice to Mrs. Thorne, who has got a new dress for the occasion, you must go.'

So urged, it comes to pass that Darragh does go, and she has her reward in seeing that Mrs. Thorne is radiantly happy in her faultless toilette on the box-seat.

A royal highness or two are coming to lunch on Lord Portbank's drag, when the march past is over, and altogether they are a much honoured and very conspicuous party who occupy it; for Darragh, excited by the spectacle, is looking her best, and her best is a magnet for all men's eyes.

The 'Black Watch' have passed to the tune of 'The Campbell's are Coming,' and now the splendid soldierly 18th go by, with the Anglo-Irish Duke at their head, to the spirited melody, 'St. Patrick's Day in the Morning.' At sight of the scarlet tunics worn by her dashing-looking countrymen, Darragh waves her parasol of emerald green, tufted at the top and fringed with shamrocks, and cries out

‘For Ireland!’ with such a thrilling and penetrating clearness that all around hear her, and she becomes the object of more attention than ever.

And among these many a one hears her whom she has not seen yet, and who has not seen her.

Ronald Mackiver’s company has been moved from Aldershot to London, and it is only the Aldershot division which has been reviewed to-day, consequently he is here as a man, not as a soldier, free to go to Darragh and to at least share the sweetness of her presence and smiles with others.

Free? No; a most thoroughly enslaved man, weighted with chains that he will never be able to shake off.

It is a relief to him that Arthur Thynne is not with her, for it adds to the torments he suffers about her to see her in the society of the man to whom she owes allegiance. But his rejoicing on this point is quickly balanced by pain, as he recognises Lord Portbank, and sees the glance of undisguised adoration with which that infatuated nobleman is regarding the Irish girl.

‘I believe you look upon it as a folly, or a crime, or a piece of benighted ignorance on the part of every fellow who isn’t an Irishman,’ Lord Portbank is saying to her as Ronald comes close to the side of the drag and she bends down to shake hands with him. Then the lover who has been rejected, and who is conscious that his rejection is known to all men, but who courageously means to try again, says to the unavowed lover, whose case is unknown to all but Darragh and himself—

‘Come up, Mackiver, and have some lunch, that is, if Miss Thynne can bring herself to feed in company with a Scotchman.’

‘Can you bring yourself to tolerate me for an hour?’ Ronald whispers, as he springs up and places himself by her

side ; and she gives herself up to the joy of having him near her, and salves her conscience by telling herself that his being there is the result of accident, not design, on the part of either of them.

The march past comes to an end at last. The Queen and princesses drive away to Windsor, the royal personages who lunch on Lord Portbank's drag come up, and the glorious scene changes from one of military pomp and circumstance to a brilliant picnic on a colossal scale.

It is hard to resist the influences of the dazzling scene. All around fair women and brave men are flirting with and striving to fascinate one another. From the very top of the social tree down to its roots the old game of love is being played ! It would be unnatural if the two to whom it is no game, but the sad earnest reality of their lives, could banish love's semblance from between them !

'If I had known you were here to-day, and that we should meet if I came, I would have stayed away ; you would have wished me to do it ?' he says ; and she answers—

'No, I shouldn't have wished it ; I am not good enough for that ; but I should have thought you ought to do it. It would have been right, you know ; but you came in innocence, and I can't even wish you away.'

'I have come, and I can't help being happy ; but I shall expiate that part of my fault by the misery I shall feel by-and-by, when you're gone.'

'Perhaps we shall never see each other again,' she says piteously. It does seem so cruel to her, with all the world so bright as it is to-day, that the thick darkness of total separation from Darragh must soon envelop her.

'Does Dolly know?' he mutters presently ; but Lord Portbank, who has been watching the murmured conversation between these two with envious eyes for some time, cuts

in now, and now courtesy compels Darragh to give him her attention for a few minutes.

But as soon as she can she reverts to the subject which is the all-engrossing one to Ronald and herself.

‘Yes, I told her,’ she says to him. ‘She half-guessed and I half-told. Dolly loves you nobly. She would see your happiness secured at any cost to herself.’

‘And only *you* can aid her in securing it,’ he says desperately. It is too awful that, if Dolly can resign him to Darragh, the resignation should not be accepted.

‘Why should you think it better that we should all three be unhappy?’ he pleads. And for a moment or two he holds Darragh’s hand in a close clasp. ‘Why should you make Dolly’s sacrifice of no avail?’

‘Ah!’ she says, ‘there are some sacrifices that are so grand in themselves that their being of no avail is a very minor matter; and I have my duty laid out very plainly before me—my duty to Arthur and, through Arthur, to Ireland.’

‘You leave me an aimless and miserable man, Darragh,’ he tells her solemnly. ‘And the knowledge of that will lessen your power of performing the “duty” you put before love.’

‘Your anger only makes me unhappy. It won’t alter my resolution one tiny bit. Besides, why should we be happy when we have been the cause of such sorrow to Dolly? No! I’ll keep my right to her trust and love, and you shall try to win them back again.’

‘I tell you that is all over,’ Captain Mackiver says. ‘Dolly is not the girl to break off and take on again. As I told you just now, your course involves the wretchedness of all three of us; but you’re stronger than I am, Darragh, and better, and truer.’

So the subject closes, and during the drive back to town Ronald, who goes back on the drag at Lord Portbank's special request, tries to make Darragh feel that he is determining to bear his part of the burden 'like a man.'

Like a brave and honourable man he vows that he will never tempt her again. Dolly's sacrifice shall not be of no avail ! It shall ennoble him !

So he resolves and vows ; and gathering strength from the mere effort he makes to gain it, he feels already that he can face the thought of the painful blank which his life will be without Darragh.

But he does heartily hope that he may be draughted off to the seat of war soon, and that, without being reckless, he may meet a soldier's fate by dying a soldier's death.

It is owing to no fault in either the horses or the driver, but just as they are approaching Prince's Gate—close to the Thornes' house, in fact—something gives way, and after swerving wildly for a few moments, the near front wheel comes off and the coach is overturned.

The ladies are shot some distance, and picked up, bruised and scattered, but with unbroken bones. Lord Portbank himself is a trifle stunned, and recovers his consciousness to find his wrist sprained. The servants inside are nearly shaken to a jelly. Mr. Thorne, by far the oldest and heaviest man of the party, gathers himself together, and feels rather fresher after than before the accident. And Ronald Mac-kiver is insensible happily to the injuries he has sustained.

He is carried into the Thornes' house and laid upon a bed ; and soon two of the first surgeons in London are examining him and finding out to what extent the mechanism has been broken and destroyed. 'He may live !' is the first verdict ; and then it is added, 'but we fear it will be as a cripple !'

When she hears that, Darragh knows that her love for him is not a mere summer's-day dream, for she finds herself praying with all the fervour of her faith and race that she might in honour be that cripple's wife.

It is many weeks before Ronald comes out of the darkness of the valley of the shadow of death into the light of life with understanding, and during all these weeks Darragh is Mary Mackiver's most efficient aid in nursing him. That he is not conscious of her presence is the feature in the case that makes this course of hers safe as well as practicable, and duly every day she writes to poor, stricken Dolly, reporting progress with words of love and sympathy.

Poor Dolly, away in the midst of daily deepening disaffection, is striving with all her strength to second her brother's efforts to restore peace and plenty to the people on his estate. But the evils are too deeply rooted. Poverty, disease, and discontent are gnawing at the hearts that pant for better days, but do not nerve their owners to work for the same.

The obnoxious agent has been threatened over and over again, but he is a brave, determined man, and so he goes on his upright way unfalteringly, doing his strict duty towards his employer with a disregard of consequence to himself that appears contemptuous to those who have threatened that those consequences shall be serious.

Accordingly, though Mr. Annesley's rule is milder by far than his agent's, he is suspected of being 'Thompson's backer' behind the scenes, and a vengeful feeling supersedes the kindly regard which the fickle tenantry extended to him when his coming was a novelty. His cattle get maimed in mysterious ways. His horses sicken. Fierce quarrels arise between Powles, who finds her poultry dying wholesale of the fatal 'something' that now impregnates the Darragh

atmosphere, and the Irish servants. Finally, these leave in an infuriated body, and then, finding themselves homeless and nearly starving, they seek to inflict somewhat similar suffering on 'thim vile invaders,' by rousing local indignation against them to such an extent that the Annesleys are 'Boycotted,' to use the now too well-known phrase, in Darragh.

No one will bring them supplies, and those who serve them when they do bravely sally forth in quest of the daily necessities of life, suffer in their flesh or in their fortunes with dread promptitude. The postman is not suffered to bring letters to, or take letters from, the menaced master of Darragh or his unoffending sister. Only the Claddagh girl, who loves Darragh Thynne, has the courage to go backwards and forwards, in defiance of the desperate crew who have rebelled, with all that she can get for Miss Darragh's friend.

And because she does this her lover is attacked one night by masked men, and, after being beaten nearly out of shape in spite of his gallant resistance, he is hoarsely cautioned not to hold any further relations with the traitress Kate. Disregarding this caution, he is warned that, unless he acts upon it, Kate herself will be subjected to personal chastisement of a severe order ! This, at the hands of her chivalrous countrymen, 'who,' according to their bard, 'though they love women and golden store ! Sir Knight, they love honour and virtue more !'

And all these lawless things are because Robert Annesley will not pledge himself to let the occupiers of his various farms live upon his land without paying him anything for the privilege.

Mrs. Annesley remains on in London, hoping against hope for the return of the Honourable Mrs. O'Leary, in the vain expectation of that lady paying her just and righteous

share of the mountain of debt which is towering over Marian's devoted head. 'It is useless to try and economise now,' Mrs. Annesley tells herself; 'it will only make people suspicious, and bring the creditors down upon her in a body, if she makes any change in her style of living.'

So she goes on having her dresses from Madame White, and displaying them in all the fashionable resorts. In order that there may be no incongruity between her toilette and her equipage, she has a pair of horses in her victoria instead of the one with which she was contented at first; and in order that in her husband's enforced absence her character may be kept unspotted from the world, she has sisters to stay with her in rotation, and arrays them to match herself. Altogether, what with a fraudulently insurgent tenantry at Darragh and a wife 'well in the swim' in London, the once prosperous and successful Robert Annesley's affairs may be briefly summed up in the one desolate word—ruin!

Fortunately for the gratification of the socially soaring side of Marian's nature and the realisation of some of her sweetest and most ambitious dreams, Lady Killeen comes to town as hope in the Honourable Mrs. O'Leary is waning, and by Lady Killeen Mrs. Annesley is presented at Court, and with Lady Killeen she soon penetrates into the select circle that has the best and the brightest, the gayest, the cleverest, and the ones that have the most 'go' about them in London society.

One result that seems to promise better things from this intercourse is that Lord Killeen hears of the state of things at Darragh, and resolves to go over to see what he can do to bring about amity between the people and their luckless landlord.

'I owe it to Annesley to give him what aid I can. He's the only man I know who would have taken the place off

my hands, for he is the only man I know who has faith in the possibility of altering the unalterable. The tenantry and labouring classes of Ireland will always be unthrifty, poor, lazy, irresponsible, and untrustworthy. I am lucky to have washed my hands of Darragh.'

'I only wish we could wash our hands of Darragh the girl as pleasantly as we have of Darragh the place,' Lady Killeen rejoins. 'If she would only be sensible and marry Lord Portbank she might be able to do some practical good to the people she pretends to be so fond of. As it is, she is wasting her time and wearing out her beauty in nursing that poor mutilated man who jilted Dolly Annesley, luckily for her.'

CHAPTER XXIV.

THICKER THAN WATER!

THE Thynne blood is considerably thicker than water. Before Lord Killeen starts for Ireland to bring his experience of the 'lower-middle' and lower classes of his countrymen to bear upon the dissension and strife which has been stirred up between them and their landlord, he goes to see Darragh at the Thornes'.

He tells her that he shall start for Ireland this evening, and he sees her kindle as he details his motive for going.

'Oh, Killeen, if I might only go with you!' she cries fervently; 'there would be no unlawful rebellion against just authority, no refusal to pay just dues, if one who *loves* them as I do showed them the lawlessness of their conduct in a generous light; let me go! take me!'

'My dear Darragh,' he says jestingly, 'the world would say we had eloped.'

'Oh, Killeen! you a Thynne, to say such a thing or admit that such a supposition could occur to anyone about *us*! Be serious now; let me go with you. It will be best for me and best for Dolly that I should go.'

'And encumber those poor encumbered Annesleys more than they are already? No, you dear little girl, stay here and be satisfied with nursing Dolly Annesley's recreant lover to the best of your ability. By the way, how is Mackiver?'

'Hopelessly crippled in one arm, but recovering his general strength and power.'

'And that arm is——?'

'His right,' the girl interrupts. 'Don't make light of his affliction, Killeen; don't pretend to think that it is nothing that he should have to suffer this.'

'It must have been an awful nuisance to the Thornes that he should have had to suffer it here; and, confound it! Darragh, it's not a good thing for you that it should have got all over London that you are nursing him.'

Darragh laughs softly and gently; there is no defiant ring in her expression of amusement.

'What's bad for me about it is that it is so true,' she says. 'I have had the opportunity of getting to know him better than ever during his illness; and to know Ronald Mackiver is to love him better. Dolly and I are not happy girls.'

'It seems to me that if he definitely took the one and left the other, one at least of you might be happy, Darragh; and I am inclined to think that it would be the one he left.'

'You say neat and unpitiful things.'

'“The worst of that last saying of mine is that it is true,”' he says, quoting her own words about something else; 'but don't think that I am unpitiful about you, Darragh. We're a small family; I have no children, and Arthur is my cousin

and heir ; you're my cousin, too, dear, and blood is thicker than water ; it is in the course of nature that I shall go long before you. When I do you'll find that I haven't forgotten you, and that I haven't left you dependent on either your husband or my wife.'

' Killeen !'

' I haven't frightened you, have I ?'

' " Frightened " me is not the word : you've saddened me beyond expression ; *you*, in your fine, perfect health, to talk of dying before me——'

' You're in fine and perfect health, too,' he interrupts.

' I am,' she says, bowing her head with gentle resignation, as if health were quite a minor matter, while she has so much heaviness at her heart ; ' but my life can bring so little to anyone. Arthur will do well without me ; Darragh and the Darragh people are gone from me ; Dolly Annesley would grieve for me, but her grief would pass away, because a heart that has faltered would steady itself on her if I were gone.'

' Darragh,' he says, with more emotion than his gay nature has permitted him to display before anyone before, ' Darragh, there is something about you to-day that gives me a superstitious feeling—a feeling that we're not likely to meet again ; it's all nonsense, I know, but I wish I didn't feel it.'

' Don't go to Ireland this time, unless you let me go too,' she says imploringly ; and then he recovers himself, and laughs at her, and tells her ' it's all nonsense, that his superstitious presentiment has passed away, and that she mustn't encourage him in it.'

' I wish I could go away with the knowledge that you were safe under my roof, and under the guardianship of my wife,' he says, relapsing into thoughtfulness presently.

Darragh shakes her head. ' Lady Killeen wouldn't echo that wish, I am sure.'

‘No, she wouldn’t, I’m sorry to say ; she has many capital qualities and many failings, and one of the worst of these last is that she doesn’t love and appreciate you as everyone else who knows you does. I’ve never been quite happy since I sold the property that came into the family through your mother, Darragh.’

The girl sighs heavily ; she does not like to crush him in his present affectionate and penitential mood by telling him that she has never been happy either since that day when Darragh was sold from them.

‘And now it has come to this, that you don’t make my home yours any longer. I have not been true to the trust your father reposed in me, Darragh ; but I mean to do the right thing by you yet, as you’ll find out when you marry, or I die.’

These are his last words to her ; and, in spite of the promise they contain, they are very depressing, for blood is thicker than water with these Thynnes, and Darragh regards both Killeen and Arthur with a hearty sisterly affection.

Lady Killeen treats his going as the idlest folly.

To go now, just as the season is at its height, and the world is too busy with its brilliant pleasures to think about the Irish difficulty at all, seems to her ladyship to be the very acme of folly.

‘Isn’t it enough to worry about it in the House, and to have Arthur Thynne proclaiming himself a rebel almost, without proclaiming yourself a maniac by going over ?’ she argues, but her husband laughs at her opposition, and assures her that the truest friendship she can show towards Mrs. Annesley will be to persuade that lady to follow him without delay to her husband and her duty at Darragh.

In spite of all Lord Killeen has heard and read and feared, the state of the country seems worse than he has anticipated, now that he is in it. As soon as he mentions his destination

to the driver of the car, who, a moment before, has been an enthusiast in the cause of driving "his lordship's honour," that patriot thinks better of taking the job.

He has no special antagonistic feeling against either the 'doctor or the doctor's sister,' he avows, 'but it's not to be done, the boys on the land say, and, God willin', he's not going to do anything to help the enemies of the trodden-down tenantry and peasantry. Anywhere else his lordship's honour likes, but not Darragh. The spot is accursed while held by those who hold it now.'

Dark looks lower around Lord Killeen as he still outspokenly strives to make them understand that to Darragh—to his friends—he will be taken. To Darragh and nowhere else will he go, let what will come of it.

Then his lordship's honour's feet must take him there, for no horse and car will cover the ground between here and Darragh in his service this day.

It is an ignominious and fatiguing alternative, but he adopts it rather than dally on his way any longer. Accordingly he sets off stoutly, and arrives at Darragh just towards the close of the day, tired, hungry, and rather disposed to think hard things of the patriots who are making life unbearable and residence impossible in one of the fairest countries of the world.

He is welcomed gladly by the brother and sister, who are waiting the issue here in dire discomfort. Powles is faithful, but very ill-tempered at this juncture, for her relations to the family at the house have been discovered, and her efforts at marketing have been rendered null and void by reason of everyone refusing to serve her. The poor little garrison is in a state that nearly approaches starvation, in fact; and the advent of a visitor with an appetite is one of those complex events that demand instant and grave consideration.

Nevertheless, he is gladly welcomed, for his presence here will tone down the discontent that is so unjustly prevailing against her brother's kind, wise rule, Dolly feels. As for Powles, the subdued spirit of the cook born *and* made reasserts itself and rises superior to surrounding circumstances as she reflects that she can still command the faithful services of the once despised 'Claddagh girl' on behalf of 'Miss Darragh's friends.' Through Kathleen fish as good as any in the market finds its way, direct from her lover's boat, straight to Darragh House; and with the best of fish and by no means the worst of potatoes the unfortunate occupants of Darragh House are fain to be content while they can get nothing better.

In a day or two it is settled that Mr. Annesley, accompanied by Lord Killeen, shall at an early date meet and address all such of the malcontents among his tenantry and peasantry as reason, self-interest, curiosity, and persuasion may induce to gather themselves together. And anent this projected meeting public feeling rises high, and public sympathy is deeply felt and both loudly and mutteringly expressed.

This feeling is not in favour of the landlord.

The gathering is to be held in the audit-room in a village which lies on the border of the demesne which is farthest from Darragh House. Gloomy prognostications and dark forebodings are freely uttered in all the region round about concerning the result of it. 'If Mr. Annesley isn't prepared to act like a man, and treat his fellow-creatures like fellow-creatures, it will be an ill day's work for him that he ever bought Darragh,' is whispered about. And these whispers reach the Claddagh girl's ears and cause her to passionately adjure Miss Dolly to persuade her brother against going to collect the rents, however pacific his in-

tentions may be towards those who may refuse to pay them.

‘He may forgive them the last quarter, but they’ll not forgive him for asking for it first,’ Kathleen says warningly. ‘They’ll come to their senses in time, Miss Dolly; but just now, while the trouble’s hard on them, the hunger and nakedness, and the angry feeling that’s more bitter than either, Mr. Annesley is best away from here; it’s not I would say so if I didn’t think it from my heart, but I wish him well.’

‘My brother isn’t a coward, Kathleen; it would look like his being one if he ran away now.’

‘Better look like a coward when there’s nothing to be brave about than like a corpse, when his being one would be bitter sorrow to you, Miss Dolly,’ Kathleen says earnestly; but, though the tears spring into Dolly’s eyes at the suggestion, she merely says to her brother at their sparse breakfast on the morning of the meeting:

‘I hope that Lord Killeen and you have secured a good escort either of the military or the police for to-day.’

‘Nothing would do so much to bring matters to a painful crisis as such a precaution; don’t think of it, Annesley, there’s a good fellow,’ Lord Killeen says eagerly. ‘Don’t you be nervous about it, Miss Annesley; your brother will come back with flying colours and promises of the rent being paid.’

‘I distrust the power of either Robert’s reasonable arguments or yours, when opposed to the seditious eloquence of those who should know better,’ Dolly says confusedly, feeling that her words convey a censure to Lord Killeen’s own cousins.

‘A rumour has just reached me that a lady envoy of the Land League is going to address my ill-used tenants and upset all

my arguments,' Robert Annesley says laughingly. 'By Jove! it's rather hard that a strong-minded woman, who is probably old and ill-favoured, and so has no temptations to commit extravagances of any sort, and therefore no need of money, should interfere to prevent a fellow getting his righteous own.'

'If she's old and ill-favoured she may as well hold her peace. No Irishman will be convinced by her,' Lord Killeen says; and then he adds, with a touch of family pride in the beauty and grace of his cousin:

'Now, if Darragh took it into her head to mount the platform the whole country would rise and follow her.'

'She can win you to her way of thinking?' Dolly asks.

'Nearly; in all things that are not connected with politics Darragh can lead me with the traditional silken thread,' Lord Killeen says, half-jestingly, half-seriously; and then he adds with genuine earnestness, 'very few people know how fond I am of Darragh. I didn't know it myself until I hurt her faithful heart by selling Darragh, and then because I couldn't bear the sight of her pain and my wife's scorn of it, let her drift away and make her home with strangers.'

'I wish—I wish,' Dolly begins, speaking nervously; then a ball gathers in her throat and chokes her.

'What do you wish? That we would start? Come, Annesley, your sister is right. As we are going we had better be off at once. Don't let us seem to lag on our way to meeting them.'

'*That's* not what I was going to say at all,' Dolly cries; 'I was going to say I wish your affection for Darragh would keep you from running this reckless risk to-day.'

'If there is any risk at all it is to your brother, not to me,' Lord Killeen says, as Robert Annesley goes away to harness a certain mare, well-famed in Oranmore for her

speed and untiring courage, to the car ; 'but, trust me, Miss Annesley, I will not only bring him back safely to you, but with him will bring back a promise of better days. These clouds must break soon ; it's only the impulses of the people have gone wrong ; their real natures, which are gallant and good, will soon reassert themselves.'

'Think of the evil influences, strong, sweet, and seductive, that are brought to bear upon those natures,' she says. 'Think of the aid that is offered them if they will only cease from the labour and rebel against the rule they have never loved. Oh ! don't trust to what nature intended them to be while this glamour is upon them. A sudden fear has come upon me. I pray you to keep my brother at home to-day.'

'The sudden fear is groundless ; your nerves are shaken by the abnormal conditions of the life you are leading now, with no companions but your harassed brother and your own thoughts. There's Annesley with the car, and, as there is no groom to hold Flight, I must go out to him.'

Dolly follows him out through the hall for a few last words to her brother, and in the distance Mrs. Powles looms.

'Why don't you go with them, miss ?' that sagacious servitor suggests. 'A woman's the best safeguard against violence from Irishmen that a man or property can have, I've been told.'

The advice harmonises with her own inclinations ; accordingly Dolly strives to act upon it.

'Take me with you, Robert ; I am so dull here when you're out, and I always imagine worse than is happening when I'm alone.'

'Take your sister by all means, Annesley ; it will be quiet and safe enough ; they'll like you better for trusting your sister among them to-day, when they're at their angriest.'

But Robert Annesley waved Dolly back, kissed his hand in farewell, and sent Flight off at a pace that left Dolly and her entreaties out of sight and hearing in a few moments.

CHAPTER XXV.

‘THEY’VE SHOT THE WRONG MAN.’

‘THEY are gone! and there has been a howling through this house all the night, with no wind about, such as I never heard before even in a gale,’ Powles says solemnly, by way of comforting her young mistress.

‘The warning howl has no right to busy itself about Robert, who’s a stranger and alien to the house,’ Dolly replies, trying to laugh off the uncomfortable dread feeling which is rapidly overpowering her. Then she adds—

‘Now, Powles, let us be very busy all the hours they *must* be away; let us clean and brighten and decorate and find food and cook it, and arrange it prettily, and give them a good welcome home!’ and Powles agreeing to this, for hard work, cleaning, and cooking are all congenial to her, the morning hours do not hang heavily on Dolly’s hands or heart.

But about four o’clock she hears the wheels of a car dashing up the drive, and, rushing out to give a greeting to her brother and the friend who has gone to help him in this day of need, she is just in time to receive Darragh Thynne in her arms.

‘He is better,’ Darragh says, first of all; ‘Ronald will live, Dolly; live for *you*. Am I in time to stop your brother and Killeen from going to this meeting?’

‘They went this morning. How did you know—how did you hear?’

‘From Kathleen. My dear, true Claddagh girl wrote to me to beg me to come and go with them for ‘life’s sake,’ and I’m too late.’

‘Your cousin, Lord Killeen, will be an ample protection to Robert,’ Dolly says, trying to keep up her own spirits, trying not to let the thoughts of Ronald, which Darragh’s presence revives, rout all thoughts of others from her mind.

‘Ah! you don’t know them—you don’t know them,’ Darragh says, raising her clasped hands up and wringing them desperately; ‘they are maddened and blinded and deafened; they will not hear the voices of the friends who counsel moderation; they will not see kindness any longer in the faces of those who do not look darkly at all in authority. Urged on to bloodthirstiness by those who mean the “golden future” that they promise for *themselves*, and not for these poor sheep who have gone astray, my countrymen are forgetting gratitude and themselves.’

‘I can only say would that you had been in time to go with them, and pray that heaven’s mercy will be over them this day,’ Dolly says resignedly; and then Darragh tells her plan in feverish haste. It is to go on to the village, about five miles off, and find Mr. Annesley and Lord Killeen.

‘Killeen will be angry, but anger is easier to bear than death,’ Darragh says hopefully; but the hopefulness deserts her when the driver positively refuses to let his car be used for the purpose, saying significantly:

‘You’re best out of this stew to-day, Miss Darragh; blood is thicker than water, and it’s many of my mother’s cousins who occupy and work on the Darragh demesne. I’ll not be taking you to come between thim and their interests to-day.’

'Then I'll walk it,' Darragh says resolutely ; but Dolly points out to her that the hour has nearly come for the two gentlemen to return, and that she might miss them by taking another road.

'To have travelled so far only to be made helpless at the last by one who was born and bred on Darragh land !' the Irish girl cries passionately, turning in indignation from the driver, who bears her wrath with the philosophy of one who feels that she 'can do him neither harm nor good any more.'

'Come and help me, Darragh darling,' Dolly says ; 'they will be here soon ; their hour has nearly come.'

Alas ! the hour of one of them has come already, unconscious Dolly !

On the same day that Robert Annesley and Lord Killeen went out high-heartedly to do their best and meet their fate, Marian Annesley, still sojourning in hope, though deeply in debt, in the bijou residence in Green Street, receives a letter which fills her with dismay.

The letter is from her eminently attractive, though rather erratic, friend, the Honourable Mrs. O'Leary, and, to Marian's amazement, is dated from Galway city.

'It may have occurred to you before this that my residence here was not altogether the motiveless one it appeared to be to mere superficial minds,' the lady writes ; 'therefore *you* will not be surprised to hear I am back here in my publicly official character as a member of the Ladies' Land League Association, and as a speaker in the cause I have long had at heart, namely, the redemption of this lovely land from the illegal sway of those who rule in it. My visit to Paris was paid in the same cause. I went there under orders to receive further directions from some of our

organizing members, and now I am back here prepared to carry them out in their fullest entirety. I fear your husband will disapprove of me more thoroughly than ever when he learns this, more especially as I am called upon to address a meeting close to his borders the day after to-morrow.' ('That's to-day !' Marian observes, parenthetically, as she reads these words.) 'I suppose there will be no chance of my coming into actual collision with Mr. Annesley, though I must do so with his landed interests. Mr. Arthur Thynne is coming over here to-night, and will support me on the trying occasion of my making my first platform speech to the people who have regarded me hitherto as a mere fashionable butterfly.'

'The horrible woman !' Marian cries, with genuine feeling ; 'she's only doing this for the sake of notoriety. Not one word about a settlement of the debts she has led me to incur, not even so much as an apology for having put me to such cruel inconvenience, and I haven't a friend to whom I can apply in this emergency, and my husband has as good as deserted me, and——'

'Oh ! don't give way yet, Marian,' the sister to whom she is making her plaint interrupts. 'Let us think our way out of some of your difficulties.'

'That's more easily said than done,' Mrs. Annesley says ruefully. 'I may get out of them in imagination, but I never shall in reality, unless Robert acts sensibly and gives up that place in Ireland and takes up his practice in London again.'

'Now, Marian, how can he do that? He's sold it,' the practical younger sister reminds her ; 'but if you make it known here that your husband is ruined because his tenants won't pay their rents, and that he and Dolly are starving like rats in a hole because no one dares to take

them food, you will be pitied instead of being dunned, that is, if you drop all the show and gaiety at once.’

‘That’s just what I don’t want to do,’ Marian pouts. ‘What *is* the good of my having been presented and of my being asked everywhere by the best people if I drop everything now? It’s my duty to try and keep up my husband’s position, though he neglects to do it himself.’

Then, with her sense of wifely duty in this direction strong upon her, Marian goes to dress herself for a bazaar at Kensington House, at which Lady Killeen is to hold a most attractive stall—‘Koumiss’ at two shillings a glass, and white kittens at four guineas a pair.

Mrs. Annesley is to aid in dispensing one of these two necessities of life ; the Koumiss falls to her share, and towards the good end of disposing of it harmoniously she wears a cleverly-devised ‘milkmaid’s dress’ in the finest white and blue cashmere. A garland of superb pale pink and white roses surrounds her broad hat, another encircles her waist and wreathes itself to the hem of her dainty dress. Altogether, the appearance of the ruined Irish landlord’s wife is simple, effective, and prepossessing to a degree, and, as Lady Killeen considerably whispers to everyone : ‘She’s keeping up with an *immense* effort to-day, poor thing ! Her husband is literally besieged in his own house in Galway—Boycotted, you know, and *quite* ruined ; but her interest in our cause is *so* great,’ Marian’s cause creates universal commiseration, and she drives a thriving trade.

Men who have not tasted milk since the days of their unresisting infancy, drink Koumiss now at her bidding as freely as the kittens lap up the cream, which is another specialty of this Arcadian stall. Altogether, Marian is so happy in the success she has made that she ceases to think

dismally of the 'state of things in Ireland,' on account of which she is being so widely pitied, while Lady Killeen never gives a thought, dismal or otherwise, to them at all.

And this, on the day that Robert Annesley and Lord Killeen take that fatal, foolhardy drive, from which one of them is destined never to return.

The bazaar is over, practically, when the Prince and Princess drive away at seven o'clock. Lady Killeen has a dinner this night, for which Marian dresses in robes of splendour that banish all recollection of, and obliterate all resemblance to, the milkmaid.

The dinner is one of those feasts of fashion where the viands are as perfect as nature and art can combine to make them, and the guests are more perfectly selected and amalgamated even than the viands. It is a luxurious, rather prolonged repast, and by the time it is over it is time for Mrs. Annesley to go home and array herself for a ball at the house of a Cabinet Minister's wife.

Her bed and dressing rooms in the little house in Green Street are a blaze of light, and her clever maid and admiring sister are just putting the final touches to a dress, the tone and texture, make and style of which would make an ugly woman lovely, when a telegram is brought to her.

'Just open it and see if it's from Robert,' she says to her sister; 'if it's not from him it can wait.'

The girl obeys her gaily, opens the telegram, and reads a few words; then, stepping aside in order that the expression of her own face may not be seen, she says:

'It is from Robert. You must read it yourself, Marian! —you must!'

The telegram is snatched from her hand by Marian, whose eyes dilate with horror as she reads it.

Two hours before this telegram is received by Mrs.

Annesley, two anxiety-stricken girls are walking up and down in the faint young moonlighted darkness before the house at Darragh.

It is long, long past the time when Robert Annesley and the gallant, genial guest, who has gone with him hoping to better his cause, ought to have returned, and anxiety is fast merging into despair in the breasts of the sister of the one man and the cousin of the other. Not a word has reached them as to the events of the day, not even Kathleen, the loyal Claddagh girl, has been to them, and they know that hard, stiff lines, which she has not dared to break, must have been drawn around her in order to keep her away.

‘It’s so hard to be only women on such a day as this,’ Darragh says at length, when the silence between them has become terrible from the way in which each has occupied it in thinking.

‘What could we do if we were men?’ Dolly asks.

‘Go out and look for them, find them, and help them,’ Darragh replies.

‘Do you think they—they *need* help?’ poor Dolly falters.

‘I know it.’

‘Ah ! how?’ Dolly cries, with the sharp ring of dreadful fear in her voice ; ‘you *can’t* know it, you can’t know more than I do. Let us hope still.’

‘Let us do what men would do if they were here,’ Darragh answers. ‘It is better that we should go out and hear what is to be heard, and see what is to be seen, than wait here for the sound and the sight ; let us go on the road and try to find them.’

‘And let us take what may be wanted if anyone’s hurt,’ Dolly says. ‘Robert’s bag, with lint and linen bandages and brandy will be the thing ; taking it won’t make it needful a bit the more, will it ?’

They find the bag neatly packed with all the appliances and restoratives that are wanted in cases of accident or inanition, and drawing their ulster hoods more closely over their heads, they take their way out through the grounds and so into the road which leads direct to the distant village where the meeting has been held this day.

It is a hot, heavy, rather dark summer night. There is just light enough for them to be able to see to avoid the ditch which lies between the road and the hedge, but not sufficient to enable them to discern and avoid such small obstacles as may be lying by the way-side.

Nevertheless, they plod rapidly on, often stumbling, sometimes nearly falling over loose stones or abrupt rises and dips in the pathway, but always resolutely pressing forward, and always on the alert.

So on and on for two weary miles, and then——Suddenly, where the hedges and banks are highest, and the darkness is the deepest by reason of the intensity of the black shadows, the two cry out simultaneously, and recoil more in anguish than in fear, for their feet have half-slipped or half-struck some soft and yielding substance, and the thought flashes into the brain of each in an instant that they are treading on a human being.

It is a man !

‘It is Robert !’ Dolly cries, instinct guiding her to the truth ; then, with arms and hands nerved to the task by affection and the hope to save, they lift the senseless man from the ground and draw him gently out of the black shadows, and by the grudging light see first that it is Mr. Annesley, and presently that he is not wounded.

From the recesses of the friendly bag they bring a bottleful of water and lave his brow with it, and pour brandy down his throat, and in a few moments have the joy of

hearing him gasp and murmur, and presently recover himself.

As he lifts himself up on his elbow, and in his dazed state and the murky light fails to recognize his succourers, he and Darragh at the same moment say--

'Where is Killeen?'

In a minute more he knows them, is able to stand up and tell them what has happened, so far as he knows.

'We had come just here,' he says, 'when some fellows jumped out of the ditch and seized Flight by the head; there was a scuffle and a shot fired, and I was thrown out, I suppose, for I remember nothing more till I felt your dear arms round my neck, Dolly. Is Killeen all right? Did he go and tell you?'

'Oh! Robert, he must be killed,' Dolly whispers. 'We have heard nothing, seen nothing of him; we got frightened and came to look for you; we----'

A stifled cry from Darragh interrupts her. The girl has gone on a few yards, and when they reach her she is kneeling down by the side of the ditch.

'I can't see what it is,' she says piteously, 'but there's something lying at the bottom there, and, Dolly, the grass is wet here, where my hands are!'

'It is dew—it is water!' Dolly stammers, not believing her own words; and Darragh answers--

'It's thicker than water; it's Killeen's blood!'

There is no one to help them. From a cottage—a desolate, half-ruined shanty hard by—they are repulsed when they pray for aid in getting 'that' which is lying at the bottom of the ditch out of it. They are not repulsed rudely, but sorrowfully.

'What's left of me home would be burnt about my ears to-morrow if I helped you, sorr,' the man of the house says.

And when Robert Annesley turns away hopelessly, this man mutters to his wife—

‘The saints be good to us all this night ! *They’ve shot the wrong man !*’

There is no one to help them ; so these three apply themselves to the task of lifting the still warm body of the murdered man out of the ditch. Then, while Dolly and Darragh watch by it, Mr. Annesley walks away into Galway for a stretcher and the police, and in a few minutes all the city knows that another foul deed has been done ; another deadly sin committed in poor Patriotism’s outraged name ; another innocent victim offered up at the horrible shrine of idle, bloodthirsty Discontent.

They have shot the wrong man ! It is a pity, and they regret the mistake, more on account of having missed the right one than because of any remorse they feel about the guiltless one’s death. A few fiery words from that fair espouser of the Irish cause, Mrs. O’Leary, the next day, assail all the pangs a few of the more rigidly conscientious are feeling.

‘In a great national struggle like the present,’ she says, ‘every real lover of his country must be ready to sacrifice his nearest and dearest ; and if a shot that is meant for the heart of a usurper and a robber of our rights finds its way instead into the heart of one of us, my friends, will we not be ready to die, blessing the intention and forgiving the result ? The accident of last night must not depress you, nor cause you to falter on the path bristling with English bayonets and bailiffs’ writs of eviction, and orders for shameful arrest on which you are treading so nobly and gallantly. If Lord Killeen’s was the soul of a true Irishman, it is now from its place in heaven looking down upon you gratefully, and breathing a prayer of thanksgiving that the mischance

of last night has saved him from the temptation of being reckoned with his country's foes and oppressors. Light lie the turf on his grave, and let the thought of his unintentionally spilt blood nerve you to fresh and calmer efforts, and to greater precision of aim—in all things.'

These words, uttered with all the heart and heat, force and grace, which Mrs. O'Leary has at command, eliminate the sad and restore the savage element in the popular mind as successfully as the most sanguinary among her employers can desire; and, after being cheered to the echo, she goes back to her pretty house and waits impatiently for a visit from Arthur Thynne, the new Lord Killeen. If he applauds her for what she has said her triumph will be great indeed!

Meantime her words are faithfully reported to Darragh by Kathleen, and Darragh does not forget one of them.

Darragh's woe and self-abasement, her remorse, and longing for retribution to fall on the murderers of her cousin, are very terrible things to witness in these days. She cannot rid herself of the remembrance that some of her own words may have fanned this flame which has now burst forth and begun to consume the land and destroy the members of her own house. She loathes the recollection of all her seeming partisanship with these sham patriots, whose seditious teaching leads to loss of life, religion, manliness, anarchy, and demoniacal confusion. She shudders at the thought of sharing the title of Killeen with the one who has helped to bring about the bitter end by which the last one who bore that title perished. She shrinks, with the shrinking in which there is deadly fear, from the idea of the possibility of women arising at this juncture in her own land, terrible, relentless, tigress-like as were the women of the French Revolution. And, worse than all her other fears and remorse, is the fear and remorse she feels at

being pledged to share the fate of the man whom she herself has helped to bind to this unhallowed cause.

‘How shall we meet each other?’ A dozen times in the day before she sees Arthur does she ask herself this question. When he does come she meets him with a cry of horror, for Powles announces him as ‘Lord Killeen,’ and Darragh can only think of her murdered cousin by that name.

‘One would think you hated me, Darragh,’ he says reproachfully; ‘one would think that it was my fault.’

‘Were you with that woman when she addressed the meeting yesterday, before Mr. Annesley and *he* spoke to them?’ is all her answer, and he averts his eyes as he replies:

‘I was.’

CHAPTER XXVI.

TWO PARTINGS.

THE interview between the cousins is not a pleasant one. That Arthur should have associated himself on the very day of Killeen’s murder with the female firebrand whose words have been as oil on the vindictive flames which are being lighted in the country against the landlord interest, is a matter of poignant pain to the girl, who feels that she is identified with Arthur’s actions in the eyes of the world; and her pain makes her hard.

‘Come and look at his face,’ she says, springing up; ‘it is bruised and blackened. The coward who killed him must have put the pistol close to his brow; but it’s the face that we have both loved since we were children, the face that has

never been turned away in coldness from us, however much we may have tried him and run counter to him. Come and see Killeen, and after *that* sight go back and encourage your beautiful savage in her unwomanly ways if you can.'

'I can't stand it,' the new Lord Killeen says, hanging back at the door of the chamber of death. 'Don't ask me, Darragh; you have shaken my nerves by your words, for they seem to imply that I have helped to bring poor Harry's fate upon him.'

'Separate yourself openly at once from this woman and the party who are using her.'

'Proclaim myself a renegade, in fact; that is what you would have me do, is it, Darragh?—falter away from the cause directly it brings sorrow to our own family?'

'Nothing of the sort,' she says steadily. 'Be really loyal to the land you love; have no part with those who would add to her miseries by inciting her half-maddened and starved people to rush into unequal warfare against armed authority to their own destruction; range yourself with Ireland's real friends—with the moderate men; not with those who counsel murder, and employ women to gloss the foul subject over with their silvery tongues.'

'You would make me a waverer,' he says discontentedly. 'Upon my word, Darragh, you hurt and disappoint me cruelly. The opportunity has come, has been forced upon me—by most unhappy circumstances, I admit—of proving myself a powerful friend to the country. As Lord Killeen, with a good rent-roll, I can do a thousand times more than I could as Arthur Thynne, with a doubt ever in my mind as to how I was to pay for my chambers and club. I look to you to share the additional power and responsibilities as well as the title and property with me, Darragh; and,

instead of giving me the promise that you'll do so, you want to hold me back and—and hamper me.'

'I shall never share the title and property, the power and responsibility, with you. I'll only pray you to use them well.'

The words are out of her mouth before she has made up her mind that it will be well to utter them. They spring forth spontaneously, staggering Lord Killeen and shocking herself.

'You throw me over, Darragh?'

'Don't call it *that*! Arthur, Arthur, I could not make you a good wife now; your ambition and hopes could never be mine now! I could not feed them, I could not bear to see them gratified; they would be for ever between us, and such love as ours is not strong enough to bridge them over.'

'It is true, then, what I have heard,' he says chokingly; 'and this—this *miser*y'—he waves his hand towards the room where his dead cousin is lying—'gives you the excuse you have wanted——'

'Are you thinking of Captain Mackiver?' she interrupts, and he tells her:

'Yes.'

'I am glad you have told me so—yes, glad, though it makes me say words that will blister my tongue. Arthur, I am weak enough to love him, I admit that; but I shall never be wicked enough to marry him.'

'You say so, thinking to comfort me.'

'No; I would not say it unless it were true. I think too well of you to comfort you with a falsehood. I say it because I mean it as solemnly as I mean it when I say, "I must die."'

'Darragh, I can't lose you,' he cries suddenly. He has

been dazzled by another woman—by other women! But Darragh shines them all down in his fickle heart when he is with her.

Moreover, she has the additional charm for him now of being one who will grace the title better than any other woman whom he has ever seen. His brilliant fate and fortune will be robbed of half their sheen if Darragh does not share them with him. Staunch Irish patriot as he is, he intends spending most of his time in London, now that he will have the means of enjoying the best London can give him, and Darragh shall be made to feel that after all she has not lost much by refusing Portbank.

For Portbank, 'though not exactly an ass,' Lord Killeen tells himself, will never make much noise in the Legislature.

'I can't lose you, dear,' he goes on. 'I am what I am through *you*, and if others wearing our colours, and fighting on our side, press forward too hotly, and sometimes disregard the rules of honourable warfare, it is unjust of you to blame and punish me for their offences; you are the best part of my life, Darragh.'

'Then the other part is poor indeed,' she says sorrowfully. 'Arthur, I know you as I know myself; ours is cousinly—almost brotherly and sisterly—love; why vex ourselves with trying to prove that it is anything deeper and stronger? I have felt this to be the case for some time, and have not only not told you so because I felt you——'

She pauses, undecided, for once in her life, as how she shall tell the truth.

He fills up the pause.

'I was poor and friendless, and you felt I needed you; now I am the reverse of these things, you feel justified to yourself in withdrawing your supporting arm! This is what

you would say if you told that truth you prize so highly. What a pitiful fellow I must seem to you, Darragh.'

'Never nearer nor dearer than you are now. Be my brother. I am the weak and faulty one. I am the one who must seem pitiful!' she cries, lifting up her eyes (they are streaming with tears now) to his face.

'As your "brother," even, I must feel that your rejection of me leaves you——'

'Homeless and penniless—what matter? It seems so little now. I shall be able to live, and if I am to know poverty and privation—well, they will be part of the penalty I ought to pay for the mistakes I have made for myself and for you.'

'And all this because a miscreant, of whom we know nothing—whom we never shall know, probably—has murdered one whom we both loved!' Lord Killeen says. 'We ought to be bound together more closely by the act which leaves each one of us more lonely in the world than we were before; but you decree that it shall sever us, and you have no pity.'

'I have more—I have love and care for you; with my consent you shall not have a wife who does not give you all that Dolly will give to Ronald Mackiver. The parting is a better one, Arthur, than it would be if we went on and married, and then our paths diverged.'

'*You* to condemn yourself to a life of old-maidenhood! No, Darragh, I won't accept your "definite determination." If I'm to lose you myself I'll pray that some good fellow may win you, and I'll be happier then, and bless you, dear.'

CHAPTER XXVII.

SELF-REPROACHES.

It is not often that tears fall from the eyes of the gallant and gay young Irishman ; but they are falling now as he leaves his cousin. Powles sees them as she lurks in the hall to let him out, and forthwith she weaves a powerful romance in her brain concerning the way the 'new Lord Killeen that is took on about the late Lord Killeen that was, after looking upon the latter's corpse.'

Which Arthur never did, by the way ; but this fact would have marred Powles's story.

Will the record of what he does almost before those tears are dry, shock those who have faith in the consistent fidelity of man?

With disappointment and mortification about Darragh gnawing at his heart, with real grief for his cousin's untimely and unintended end stinging his soul, with real work and anxiety connected with the title and property he has been so unexpectedly called upon to assume pressing upon him, he goes straight to Mrs. O'Leary.

She has doffed her platform garb—and anything more becoming than its matchlessly severe and perfect lines has never been seen in Galway—and has donned a saque of soft terra-cotta coloured silk frothed all over with lace. Her manner is as soft as the silk ; there is no trace in it of that impassioned savagery which possessed her this morning when exculpating the blunder which has resulted in the death of Lord Killeen. In her graceful robes and subtly-shaded room she looks like the Spirit of Peace as she comes forward with a grandly gentle air to meet the man whose high fortune is assured by the untimely end of his cousin.

'You look sad, my friend,' she begins sympathetically,

and her sympathy is not feigned. It is one of the characteristics of this woman to really like some people warmly and well, without regard to any ulterior advantage she may derive from them. Up to the present time Arthur Thynne has been of interest to her chiefly because he is an open agent in the work of which she has been a secret emissary; but now that the time has come for her to throw off the mask and work in the open instead of in the dark, Mrs. O'Leary regards him with additional interest as a colleague, an ally, emphatically as a friend.

Moreover, she has heard news this day which has awakened memories of the bygone days when she was a very young and supremely lovely woman, of the days when she was greatly prized and (apparently) dearly loved, of the days when she was really hopeful of passing through life an honoured and honourable woman. These days are past, never to return with one of their fond, foolish hopes and aspirations. But she remembers them tenderly this day, when the news reaches her from a source she cannot distrust, that the husband from whom she has been so long parted, and whom she had often so bitterly reviled, died some months ago, and died forgiving her.

She does not really mourn for him, she does not even deem it necessary to go through the farce of putting on sombre black on his account, but she remembers him very vividly now that the news reaches her that she is freed from him for ever, and even more vividly does she remember those vain hopes of higher happiness which she had entertained when first they were married. The higher happiness has never been hers, and that it is so has been as much her fault as his. But all that is over now, and she is really a free woman at last—free to begin a new life, and—who knows?—a better one perhaps.

She has been 'thinking out' this subject when Lord Killeen comes in, and there is a moonlight tenderness in the tone and manner in which she goes to greet him with the words—'You look sad, my friend.'

There are some men to whom it is an absolute necessity to have a confidant. Arthur Thynne is one of these. Concealment never has a chance of feeding on his cheek for a minute. Nor need the one in whom he confides ever feel it to be a special compliment that he does so. The only rule he observes in selecting his confidant is to appoint the first person he meets who has time to listen to him to that honoured post. Accordingly, now, there being a great air of restfulness and repose about Mrs. O'Leary, and her first words unlocking the door of the sorrow at his heart, he pours out his story to her without hesitation or restraint.

'She will relent,' are her first words, when she has listened patiently to the tale.

'You hardly know her ; she has not done this in spite or spleen, or on a sudden impulse.'

'You mean that she has had it in her mind to do it for some time?'

'I think so.'

'Then she is sly,' Mrs. O'Leary says, all unguardedly ; and Lord Killeen's family pride sends the blood flying to his brow as he replies :

'That's just what a Thynne couldn't be. And Darragh, least of all the Thynnes that ever lived,' he says with such out-spoken zeal for Darragh that Mrs. O'Leary finds herself echoing Desdemona's wish that 'heaven had made her such a man.'

'What is it, then, according to you?' she asks. 'You must have some theory about the reason of the change.'

'I think she stuck to me while she felt I needed her ;

now she thinks I am prosperous and can do without her—without the knowledge that I have her to fall back upon when I mislead myself.’

‘You don’t think that her own heart has misled her ; do you? You don’t think that she has been “misled” by that tricking guide into caring more for some other man than she does for you?’

‘If I thought so I would not say it in the way of either explanation or censure,’ he says, with a great effort at calmness. It galls him to hear the cousin who has been playmate, sister, sweetheart all in one to him discussed and animadverted upon, even by this lady, whose sympathy is peculiarly sweet to him just now. Besides, in very truth, he is an Irish gentleman, and it is not in him to say aught about any woman—much less about Darragh—that might bring a sneer to another woman’s lips about her.

Mrs. O’Leary is clever enough to read this in a moment.

‘And I would not ask you to say it, Lord Killeen, if the saying it conveyed anything like censure,’ she says soothingly, laying her hand on his ; ‘but I am a woman ! only a woman ! and that a heart should stray from the path in which it has been put to run doesn’t seem to me a very unwomanly or culpable thing. It wasn’t curiosity, it wasn’t the desire to find a weak place in a neighbour’s fence, it was only interest, uncalled-for, perhaps, and ill-advised, but *real* interest in you for all that, which made me offer the suggestion.’

‘I know that ;’ her hand is in his instead of merely resting upon it by this time, and Lord Killeen is rather astonished to find what a sense of comfort, what a thrill of pleasure the clasp of that hand imparts. ‘I know that, and I’m grateful to you for coming out of the brightness of your own life to try and lighten the clouds that are about me just now,’ he

says earnestly, meaning what he says thoroughly, for he knows nothing of the debts and difficulties and dire uncertainties which are encompassing this poor woman on every side.

Then she tells him, in very subdued tones, but without any affectation of grief for the man who is gone, the tidings that have reached her to-day relative to the husband whom she has often abused to him; and he listens inattentively, without a presentiment that this death will in any way influence his own life.

‘I shall put on no symbols of mourning,’ she tells him, ‘for they would be symbols only—the mourning is not here. There was a time when I thought that if kind Death would only relieve me of his sway I would take a boat and put out to sea, and drop my wedding-ring down into the waves, and with it drop all remembrance of the bitter mistake of my marriage. But I haven’t the feeling to do this now; after all, I had a *few* happy days when this ring was first put on, and I’ll wear it still in memory of them.’

‘I wonder how many men and women are really happy in their marriages?’ he says meditatively. ‘Killeen wasn’t, I know, poor fellow, though he was patient as an angel with her ladyship, and always tried to make the best of his poor bargain; and I shouldn’t say that the Annesleys’ domestic life is one of unmixed bliss.’

‘Neither of the women you have mentioned has it in her to be friend as well as wife,’ she says; and she is a trifle disappointed when he drops the hand he has been holding all this time, and, starting up, exclaims—

‘No, you’re right there! That’s just what Darragh would have been, though—friend, guide, love—everything that a woman should be.’

‘More “guide” than anything else, I’m thinking,’ Mrs.

O'Leary says incisively. 'Your beautiful Darragh is born to rule ; you are not born to be ruled.'

But though she says this in her most dulcet, most convincing tones, Lord Killeen is not won back to his seat by the siren's side, nor does he resume the interrupted clasp of her sustaining hand—this day.

By-and-by, away from the influence of her subtly-shaded room, and great personal charms, he reads in the columns of a frantic little free and fetterless journal the speech she has made this morning, and he reads it with unmitigated disgust.

Later in the day two men are arrested on the charge of having shot at, with intent to murder, Mr. Annesley, and of having shot and killed Lord Killeen.

To Darragh's indignant grief and horror, one of these is a man on whose fidelity she would have staked her own life—the Claddagh girl's lover !

Mrs. Annesley has an overwhelming sense of responsibility upon her as soon as her eyes fall on the terrible telegram. It is from Robert ! There is great comfort to her in the midst of this misery, in the fact that Robert at least is alive and uninjured, but her heart sickens as she reads :

'Killeen has been killed ; the shot was meant for me, I am sure. You must break the awful news to his poor widow.'

For a few moments she sits down crushed and almost paralyzed by the weight of the burden that has been laid upon her, and wonders if it be possible to evade the pitiless task. But quickly the real womanliness that is beneath her vanity and carelessness asserts itself, and she rises, praying that she may be given grace to tell the cruel truth tenderly and wisely.

If she can only catch Lady Killeen before the latter leaves home for the ball ! There is still a chance of doing this, for

Lady Killeen is apt to be late on these occasions. Mrs. Annesley suspends her own dressing operations, and, hurrying on a large wrap, runs down to her carriage and sets off again for the house which she has but lately left, to tell the happy successful hostess that she is the widow of a murdered man !

‘How shall I begin?’ she asks herself over and over again, as her carriage rapidly traverses the short distance between the two houses; ‘it’s slow torture to “break things” gradually, and the shock may kill her if I blurt it out abruptly; how shall I begin?’

She is at the door now, hearing, as one hears things in a dream, that ‘her ladyship left ten minutes ago.’ As the servant tells her this her dazed face, pallid in the full lamp-light, strikes him with a sudden conviction of evil to the house he serves, and he adds hurriedly :

‘You bring bad news for my lady, ma’am; is it about——’

‘The worst, the very worst,’ she says, with a gasp that prepares him for the words that follow. ‘Lord Killeen has been killed, shot in mistake for some one else, Mr. Annesley telegraphs, and I must go and tell her.’

‘No,’ the servants says, wiping his eyes undisguisedly; ‘her ladyship must be fetched home, and hear it from you here, ma’am; your face would tell her the truth before you could speak, and to hear it in a ball-room——Her ladyship must be fetched home.’

All that is best and most womanly in Marian Annesley springs into stronger life as she sits waiting for Lady Killeen in the still-lighted *salon*, in which they have all been so merry but an hour ago. But for the merest chance—an unsteady aim, perhaps, or the failure to discriminate between the two men—her own husband would have met with Lord Killeen’s fate, and she would have been the bereft woman to whom

the grim tidings still have to be broken. As this reflection is borne in upon her mind, a sharp twinge of conscience for having let him go into peril without her seizes her, and with unfeigned feeling she says :

‘I will be a better wife if it pleases God to spare him !’

The minutes that she has to wait seem like hours, and yet she dreads their passing, dreads the moment that must bring her face to face with the poor wife who is to learn from her (Marian) that she is a widow. When she hears the carriage stop, and a moment after hears Lady Killeen’s rich robes rustling as she hastily sweeps through the ante-room, and then across to the spot where Marian stands, the latter feels her heart cease to beat, and fancies that the words, ‘Your husband is murdered,’ are printed on her brow.

There is a presentiment of some sorrow ahead in Lady Killeen’s mind, but she is far, poor thing, from guessing or suspecting the extent of the calamity which has overtaken her until Marian looks up and holds her hands out. Then, in a flash, it all reveals itself, and with a piteous, helpless sob she cries :

‘Tell me how—tell me everything.’ Then the two women, who have been united in the fellowship of frivolity and fashion for some time past, are drawn closer together in the holier fellowship of sorrow and sympathy.

It is worthy of remark that no outbreak of violence against, no fierce denunciations of, those unknown ones who have murdered her husband break from Lady Killeen’s lips as the story, so far as it is known to Marian Annesley, unfolds itself.

‘He met his death trying to be of use to Robert,’ Mrs. Annesley cries, bowing her head down as she kneels by Lady Killeen’s side. ‘Will that thought stand between us?—will

it make you find more pain than comfort in anything I can do for you or say to you ?’

‘I don’t know yet,’ poor Lady Killeen says hopelessly. ‘How can I answer for myself? I never knew till now how I loved Harry, and now the knowledge comes when it is useless; how can I answer for myself?’

By-and-by the morning light flickers in and pales the lamps, and still these two are together, bitterly sorrowing still, but groping their way out from their deadliest bitterness by means of prayers framed by their needs and worded by their hearts.

What a long time ago now it seems since they stood together in the most picturesque stall of the bazaar which will be the pet theme of all the papers to-day! How *could* they have fooled with kittens and foisted koumiss on unwilling drinkers when these grim realities were being endured by their husbands in Ireland!

‘Harry wouldn’t have let me go into danger alone,’ the widow moans out more than once; and then she adds, ‘why didn’t God bring out the love I had for Harry before?—why has He left it till it’s too late to be a comfort to him; do you think that the people who have done it will repent *now*, Marian?’

‘Of having caused his death, perhaps; not of their own madness,’ Mrs. Annesley ventures to think.

‘Darragh will not uphold them any longer, will she? Oh, Marian! she’ll marry Arthur and be Lady Killeen now. Will she hate me still now my husband is murdered?’

She falls into a piteous fit of weeping as she asks this. The thought of Darragh, whom she has always flouted more or less, wearing the title, and sitting in the seat of the scornful above her, is the one straw too much for her broken spirit; yet, to do her justice, it is not because she thinks

that Darragh will be powerful now that she longs for her to be kind, it is because 'Darragh loved Harry, and Harry loved her, and wanted me to be like a sister to her, and I was a jealous fool and wouldn't ! and now ! oh ! my husband !'

'Darragh won't forget the love now, and she will forget that you didn't like her. I don't care much for Darragh myself, but I would always trust her to be generous, you know,' Marian says, with the more assurance that she sees Lady Killeen is yearning for signs of kindness and kinship from her husband's family.

'Generous !—yes, that's what they all are, all the Thynnes are generous,' the poor widow says eagerly, something like a smile quivering over her lips as she recalls one of the most splendid attributes of her late lord. 'I've had as much money as I've known what to do with all my life, but Harry could always have spent more than he had on other people ; and I checked him sometimes, yes ! brute that I was, I checked him sometimes, reminding him that I had brought him a fortune, and making him feel that I was the one on whom that fortune should be chiefly spent. I even grudged Darragh a home here ; and now——!'

Marian is powerless to stand against this storm of self-reproach. All she can do is to avow her belief that Darragh will come soon and soothe this suffering by a display of the very generosity which is now added to it.

'But I shall be nothing to her, you see !' Lady Killeen says miserably. 'I shall only be her cousin's widow, and she will be justified in doubting that I was a very loving wife. Marian, if my husband's family turn away from me I shall be a desolate woman ; but Darragh is generous, as you say ; she is a real Thynne.'

As Mrs. Annesley drives home in the pallid light of dawn she resolves that this trouble which is crushing Lady

Killeen shall not fall upon herself. If Robert's lines are cast in Ireland, unpleasant place as it is, so shall hers be also. Without delay she will wind up affairs here in Green Street, face the worst, ask outright and boldly for a cheque to defray the bills she ought never to have incurred, and go over to Darragh in a fit of contrite economy to share her husband's fate and fortunes.

This is her resolve as she drives home in the pallid light of early dawn.

But later in the day she sees in strictest seclusion a few dozens of her most intimate friends, and these convince her that it is her duty to stay where she is, to keep her husband's name before the world, in anticipation of that day when he shall sensibly return to his peaceful and paying practice in London. Lord Killeen's murder is an awfully sad thing indeed, but since it has mercifully averted a similar fate from Mr. Annesley, common sense and wifely affection combine to make her regard it with resignation. And as for her going to Ireland to join him ! why, common sense and wifely affection ought to combine their forces to keep her in London in order that he may be lured there with as little delay as possible.

The papers teem with reports that are more or less inaccurate of the manner and the motive of Lord Killeen's death ; but, widely as they may differ in other respects, they are all agreed in this : that Lord Killeen died in place of another man ; that, in fact, the bullet which has pierced his brain was 'well-meant' for Mr. Annesley ! And still Robert and Dolly are at Darragh, and Marian is in London.

Three days after the murder the new Lord Killeen is in London soliciting an interview with the widow of the late one. It is only her due that he should do this, and no one but himself knows how he shrinks from the task.

His has been a soul-saddening journey, for he has brought with him the corpse of the cousin who has fallen a victim to the more malignant spirits of that cause which he (the new Lord Killeen) has so fondly fostered. And the widow is not the woman to forget now that she has always disapproved of his politics and his manner of pursuing them.

‘She never could take a broad view of things, and there’s nothing in the world so harrowing as sharp and undeserved suffering brought on one by the hand of man,’ he tells himself, as at last he is summoned to the room in which poor Lady Killeen is wrestling with her woe.

He feels constrained and awkward, to his own surprise. Something seems to tell him that he is not altogether guiltless of having brought about this bitter end, and the same something whispers that he may be accessory to more mischief still if he goes on adding the fuel of his admiration to the flame which Mrs. O’Leary’s beauty and subtle fascination and fervid tongue are lighting in Ireland.

He is far more subdued in aspect, now that he is the rich and prosperous head of the house, than Lady Killeen had ever seen him when he was the poor, nearly dependent, cadet of it.

Lady Killeen’s heart is touched, and her confidence won by the change in him.

‘He is sorrowing for his cousin, he is repentant for ever having mixed himself up with a cause that is nurtured by blood, and that in its blind, mad, motiveless fury has sacrificed his cousin.’

So she tells herself, as, with bowed head and broken words, he comes and offers her his heartfelt sympathy.

‘Won’t Darragh come to me?’ she sobs. ‘Is she harder than you are?’

Then she learns from him how Darragh went over striving

to warn and save, and how she arrived too late, and how hers were the first hands that touched the murdered man.

‘Her whole heart has always been with the people who have killed my husband,’ Lady Killeen says, drying her eyes, and speaking very bitterly. ‘She is with them, and of them; she knew, it even seems, that his life was in danger from them; they confided that to her, or why should she have gone over to strive to warn and save, as you say? Yet she let me stay here in ignorance; she let me go out and be gay and enjoy myself. I might have been dancing at the very time they were carrying Harry’s dead body to Darragh; it was wicked of her to keep such knowledge from *me*, his wife.’

‘Darragh had no certain knowledge,’ he protests. ‘She got a hint from Kathleen—the pretty Claddagh girl, you know—and acted on it to the best of her ability.’

‘She might have influenced her friends to spare her cousin,’ the widow weeps; ‘but they and their fancied wrongs and their wicked, idle, bloodthirsty ways are dearer to her than family and respectability. Oh, Arthur! forgive me for being angry with her; forgive me for saying hard things of your love; but I have lost my husband, and she knew what was coming, and would not show me how to save him. She is in accord with them, and you are in accord with her, and I and my grief are nothing to you.’

‘Darragh’s anger and resentment, her detestation of the way they are carrying on their work, is as deep as your own; she has ceased to share my hopes and prayers for the better future of the country; or, at least, she has ceased to share my sympathy with the way they are struggling for freedom.’

‘But she will be your wife, and then she will outvie

you in your efforts ; she will urge you on to be a more pronounced partisan of the cruel cause which has murdered my husband. Oh ! I know her, Arthur ; I know how she can goad and lead ; and she will be your wife, and she will teach you to think *my* wrongs nothing compared to those imaginary ones the thoughts of which she has nursed so tenderly all her life.'

'All her heart is with you in your sorrow,' he says eagerly ; and then he adds more slowly, 'and she will not be my wife ; she has set me—set herself free.'

'Darragh broken off her engagement with you *now* ! Now that you are Lord Killeen ?'

'Even so.'

'To marry Lord Portbank ?'

'She says she will never marry anyone,' he says, with a certain sense of satisfaction in having great reliance on Darragh's word.

Then Lady Killeen bursts into a fresh flood of tears, but they are less agonizing than those she has shed hitherto have been.

'Even in my sorrow I have been hating her because I thought she was going to have my title and place, and to forget my trouble and poor Harry's kindness to her ; and now you tell me she is going to be nothing—she is not going to try and triumph over me ?'

'There has never been a thought of "triumphing over " anyone from the day of her birth, I'll swear.'

'Ah ! you don't *quite* know what women are, though you're very clever,' Lady Killeen says, sighing, and drying her eyes. 'Darragh, with all that beauty and spirit and cleverness of hers, will never be content to be in the background. She is impulsive, and not above doing things for the sake of creating a sensation, and she knows it will cause

one if she throws you over just as you come to the title and property, and are so well worth marrying. I'm a woman of the world, Arthur, and though I wouldn't judge Darragh harshly on any account—it would be an awful thing if I judged anyone harshly now I am in such deep affliction—still I think I can see through Darragh's apparent disinterestedness.'

'My own idea,' says he, rising, 'is that not one of us is blessed with the pure vision that can see Darragh aright. Bless her! She has thrown me over, and I'm smarting under it still; but she hasn't done it to serve any selfish end, or to win an additional thought about herself from any human being.'

'At least she has always been fortunate in being the idol of the men of her own house,' Lady Killeen says sharply. 'When a girl is pedestalled as Darragh is there is a great inducement for her to go on doing grand things gracefully. Everybody sees her do them; but I shall always think that she would have been doing her simple duty better if she had come to *me* with the warning that she got from her murderous associates. My influence would have saved my husband from going on a mission of ideal friendship to that vile land where neither life nor property is safe. However proud a place Darragh may take, and however spotless she may seem in the eyes of the world, I shall always remember this about her—that she was silent to *me* when a word from her might have enabled me to save my husband.'

He knows that it is useless to remind her that his poor cousin was already in the heart of the danger before the warning reached Darragh. Grief and the dread of her grief not being realised and recognised and duly sympathized with are making Lady Killeen censorious and unjust for the time; but he knows that the mood will change, and when

the change comes he relies upon Darragh being her best comforter.

For 'If she liked, she could console me for the loss of everything else in the world, the darling !' he tells himself. But, in spite of this conviction, he does not appeal to her for sympathy after his harrowing interview with Lady Killeen, but writes an account of it and the effect it has had upon him to Mrs. O'Leary. He says :

'Don't let your name get into the papers as an advocate of misrule, disorder, and destruction. The murder of Killeen and the stoning of the military and police are turning all moderate, and much earnest and zealous, partisanship away from us ; above all, the cowardly threat that they will shove their priests and women to the fore if the forces are goaded into retaliation and fire upon them, is revolting and degrading. After all, yours is wild work, not suited to your womanly nature, since it involves these ghastly complications. Give it up for my sake as well as your own, and meantime do nothing that will bring your name prominently forward.'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE TALE THE DIAMONDS TOLD.

WHEN Lord Killeen's will comes to be read, it causes almost as much consternation among the members of his family and the more immediate circle of his friends as his death has done.

For he has left ten thousand pounds out of his personal estate to his cousin Darragh.

Left it to her 'in discharge of a just debt to her late father.' Such is the way in which the legacy is worded, and no one knows that the debt is merely one of gratitude to his late uncle, or that he has taken this means of discharging it out of his dear regard for Darragh, and his doubt as to the treatment Darragh might receive from his wife, in case of the girl being dependent in any way on that lady.

'Ten thousand pounds to Darragh!' The announcement of the fact acts like a tonic upon Lady Killeen, rousing her from the enervating depths of grief, and stringing her up to the strong old spite against Darragh.

'Ten thousand pounds to Darragh!—to a girl who hadn't a claim of ten farthings against him, for he had amply repaid all imaginary kindnesses received from her father by the very real and tangible service he had already rendered her of giving her a home. If the foolish, headstrong girl was going to do well for herself—to marry Lord Portbank, for instance, and have an ascertained place in society—it would be different, and no one would grudge the money; but as it is——' Lady Killeen pauses in wrathful inability to describe the unremunerative futility which has marked this most unlooked-for action on the part of her late husband.

'As it is, the poor dear girl will be independent of us all, thank God!' Lord Killeen says heartily; 'and I think you hardly understand how good my uncle—Darragh's father—was to both Harry and myself when we were boys.'

'At any rate, I realise that the goodness is being very handsomely paid for,' Lady Killeen says peevishly. 'I am placed above want, thanks to the way in which my guardians looked after the settlements when I married—and no one

can accuse me of being niggardly ; but I do grudge this ten thousand pounds to Darragh, who will only fritter it away on those who will be ready and willing to shoot her when it's all spent. Take my word for it, Arthur, the money will not do her any good ; she'll throw it away on some Utopian scheme, and be herself a burden to her family and friends all her life.'

'A burden that everyone who knows her will strive to bear.'

'Oh ! it's all very well to put it into chivalrous and romantic language, but it is a nuisance, or may be a nuisance, just the same. I, for one, shall never strive to do anything of the kind, for I'm a practical person, and can look ahead ; it may be all very pleasant now, while she's young and lovely and attractive, and talked about prettily, to bear the burden of Darragh graciously and gracefully, but how about it when she grows into an old maid ? There's nothing much more tedious in social life than an unmarried bygone beauty ; really, I could find it in my heart to wish that she would give herself and her ten thousand pounds to Captain Mack-iver ; he would have the sole responsibility of her then, and that would be a relief to us all.'

'I don't think I should find much relief from the fact of Darragh taking such a step,' Lord Killeen says candidly, upon which his cousin's widow casts up her eyes and avows that she has no sympathy with a man who can feel either love or jealousy for a woman who has once rejected him.

'I believe in the spirit of the old song, "If she under-value me, what care I how fair she be?"' Lady Killeen says, using the spur to make him leap aside from his loyalty to his cousin.

'That's just what Darragh has never done,' he says care-

lessly. 'If anything, she has overvalued me, and as I think more of her, and of her good opinion, than of anything else in the world, I won't talk about her any more to you now, for you're not in the mood to say nice things of her.'

'You can hardly wonder at my being a little sore about Harry's infatuation,' she says deprecatingly, and he does wonder at the coarseness which can allow her to imply that her dead husband had more than the regard of a kinsman for the orphan cousin whom they (the Thynnes) regard as the glory of their house.

Other people besides Lady Killeen are greatly exercised when they hear of this handsome legacy of ten thousand pounds which has fallen to Darragh. The old Mackivers prick up their ears and tell each other that they 'see the finger of Providence' in just this sum having fallen to the lot of the girl for whom their son Ronald's heart is sick.

'It's a dispensation,' Mrs. Mackiver says solemnly. 'That which has been taken from Dolly has been given to Darragh, and it's not for us to repine.'

'Neither is it for us to scheme to make the transfer pleasant and profitable to Ronald, mother,' Mary says stoutly, and though Mrs. Mackiver avows that such was far from her thoughts, her daughter shakes an incredulous head about the matter.

Ronald hears of it with unmixed pleasure. That the girl he loves should be placed above all heart-sickening, mind-weakening anxiety and want is a source of pure and perfect joy to him. Personally he knows that he has no interest in the matter. Whether Darragh be rich or poor, it is borne in upon him pretty strongly by this time that she is not for him.

Nevertheless, as soon as he can get out of bed and walk about, he longs to rejoin his regiment, for he hears that it is under orders for Ireland.

He is in ignorance still of the rupture of the engagement between Darragh and her cousin. It is the dread that he daily rises to face, this one, that, in the course of the current day, he may hear from some one that Lord Killeen and Darragh are to be married shortly. For naturally Killeen will secure his prize now that fortune has made it possible for him to do it without delay. Naturally he will wear his jewel openly, now that he can set it so well.

Dolly hears of it with unfeigned satisfaction, for—money is money, and may it not make Ronald's path smoother?

'Not even poverty can come between them now; and I'm glad,' Dolly tells herself bravely.

But Darragh hears of it with more unmitigated, more intense, delight than any of the others. Her way is plain before her now: even as Dolly has done, she settles in her own mind that by means of this money, Ronald shall be happy at last.

Things are going very roughly and crookedly on the Galway property. Powles has proved her claim to sit for a picture of fidelity, for she only among many has the courage to remain in the home of, and to try to serve, the Annesleys. In pursuing her path she gets roughly handled and rudely assailed with straying speech very often. Still she stays on at Darragh, doing her best according to her lights, and denouncing 'them Irish wild beasts' in a way that gives many of them a handle to turn against her employers.

Evil days have indeed fallen upon Darragh and the region round about it. The bold, bright, fearless young Claddagh lad who is betrothed to Kathleen has been tried and found guilty of the murder of Lord Killeen. The re-

volver found by the ditch out of which they lifted the dead body is known to be his, and he can offer no other explanation of it's being there than this :

‘He had lent it to a friend for target practice, and he’ll die rather than tell who that friend is.’

It is in vain that Robert Annesley, stimulated to the task by Darragh’s eloquent representations, and poor Kathleen’s passionate entreaties that he ‘will try to save her innocent sweetheart,’ avows his belief in the innocence of the young fisherman, and prays that judgment may be suspended. The poor Claddagh lad is condemned to die, and popular feeling, which holds him guiltless—as indeed he is—rises higher than ever against the Annesleys and the landlords’ interest generally in ‘this most distressful country that ever yet was seen.’

Terrible scenes are witnessed daily in the neighbourhood, and though Darragh, protected by the magic of her name, goes among the people freely as of old, they disregard her exhortations to patience and pacific conduct, and degrade their cause by ruthlessly brutalizing themselves.

And one there is who leads them on down the lowering path that must end in disgrace, destruction, and death, whose beautiful physique, and fiery, maddening language makes sane and moderate lovers of their country regard her as a magnificent and seductive embodiment of its evil genius.

Mrs. O’Leary, in spite of Lord Killeen’s entreaties that she ‘will keep her name out of the papers,’ comes to the fore on all occasions in this neighbourhood now. If there is to be a sale of farms from which solvent but non-paying tenants have been evicted, the lady is there mingling freely with the insurgent throng, and never staying them with so much as a warning word or hand when the savage grows

rampant within them, and they hurl stones at the heads of those who represent law, order, and authority.

In time it seems to be coming to be almost a personal struggle for prestige and influence between Darragh—the good young lady who is ‘one of them’ and who loves them though she loathes their current course—and the fair, dangerous foreign incendiary who has begun playing the big game out of love of excitement, and for the gratification of her own ambition.

It is nothing to Mrs. O’Leary that these people, whose own woes she portrays to them so eloquently, should be inflamed till the devastating fire within them burns up not only themselves but all within their reach. Let them perish! They will have served her purpose, and the purpose of those who are like-minded to her. Her manipulation of that ‘cause of freedom’ for which they are ready to destroy themselves and others puts money in her purse, and makes her name prominent. The poor weak instruments on which she and her colleagues play do not count when she is calculating the cost. She is to the fore a marked and mentioned woman. ‘If the devil takes the hindmost’ what is that to her?

There is division even in the Claddagh camp just now. The young fellow lying in gaol under sentence of death for the murder of Lord Killeen is known to have been a faithful friend of the house, and it is known widely and with certainty that he has had no hand in the dark deed. Still, what they persist in calling ‘English’ law has found him guilty on the most damning circumstantial evidence, and though conviction has brought it home to the heart of the condemned man who the real murderer is, the brave Claddagh boy holds his peace, and resolves to suffer wrongfully rather than bring the punishment of his crime home to the real offender—who is the father of innocent children.

A strong military force is quartered in the neighbourhood now, and Ronald's regiment, by a strange coincidence, is ordered to protect the right side on the occasion of the eviction of one of the most ferocious and lawless tenants on Robert Annesley's estate, a dangerous fellow named Ferroll, who has been lurking very quietly in his lair of late—ever since Lord Killeen's murder in fact—but who has such possibilities of evil in his face, and such a dogged determination neither to pay for nor cultivate the land he professes to rent of Mr. Annesley, that the latter determines to get rid of him.

Ronald in the performance of his duty—which he does not dare shirk—Ronald pale and half-crippled still, from the effect of his late accident, is at Darragh early in the day with his company. Dolly meets him with frank freedom, with pitiful loving sympathy for the pain he has endured. But Darragh keeps aloof from him. She only sends a message to the effect that 'before he goes down to Ferroll's farm to use force, if it be needed, she may go down and try the effect of words.'

It grieves and alarms him sorely that she should desire to do this, for the character that he has heard of Ferroll does not encourage him to hope for good eventuating from Darragh's intervention. Besides, the beast is awake and at large in the minds of the people! If so much as one hair of Darragh's head is hurt!—

'She must not go!' he says passionately to Dolly; 'if even a doubt arises in my mind as to her safety I'll give the order to shoot them down like wolves—she must not go.'

'She knew you would say that, and so she's gone already,' Dolly tells him sadly; 'but don't fear for her, Ronald; Darragh Thynne is as safe in Ferroll's house as she would be in a fortress or a sanctuary; these half-maddened Irishmen will cling fast to the end to their chivalry and their faith.'

Dolly says this with all the force and fervour that a thorough conviction in the truth of them gives, but Ronald shakes his head.

'At any rate we'll follow her,' he says, and then he remembers that in his all-absorbing anxiety for Darragh he is forgetting the suffering and danger through which Dolly has passed and is passing.

'On such a day as this you ought not to be alone and unprotected here,' he says; 'if circumstances compel us to make this estimable Mr. Ferroll act upon the ejectment which has been served upon him, his impulsive friends and neighbours will probably come here and do damage in revenge. You would be safer with' ('me' he was going to say, but he checks himself, and says, 'your brother').

So Dolly, who has grown an adept at such work, saddles her own pony and goes out with her brother and Ronald at the head of Captain Mackiver's company.

Meantime Darragh has gone away through the rapidly accumulating masses of people to the desolate district where, on what was once the finest farm of the neighbourhood, Ferroll's dilapidated house stands.

Everything speaks of neglect and decay. The sheds and out-houses are half roofless, and the doors are swung off their hinges. An open cesspool just outside the house-door renders the chief entrance pestilential. Fluttering rags wave out dejectedly in the breeze from the many broken windows into which they are stuffed. A long, lean, spotted sow is thrusting her nose hungrily into a rusty, smoking boiler, from the unsavoury recesses of which a wild-eyed, bare-footed little child is also trying to hook up something tangible in the form of a potato. A few sad-looking ducks are sitting on the edge of a half dried-up pond, eyeing the water, that is growing more solid every day from the accu-

mulation of *débris* which is thrown into it, with an air of despondent doubt. A bloodhound, with lurid-looking eyes and a concentrated expression of bloodthirsty desire about the hanging lips, which he licks incessantly, lies well between the cesspool and the entrance-door, and a rusty black cat, whose coat is worn away in places, sits close to him, and testifies to the hardness of the time by striving to extract nourishment from the empty and time-dried shell of a lobster.

Darragh passes the sow and the child, the cat and the bloodhound, and pauses, regardless of the rumbling growl of the latter, on the threshold of the door.

‘My poor fellow! are you hungry too, and has hunger made you fierce—even to me?’ she says, stretching her hand out to the dog, who licks it, with a faint recollection of the time when he was a puppy in her service, and fared sumptuously from that same hand every day. Then the door is opened with a suspicious, defiant air, and Darragh finds herself face to face with the man, who looks like a desperado, and lives like a recluse.

‘Come in, Miss Darragh, though it’s the bare floor and walls, and thim not all standing, that I ask you into this day,’ and as he speaks Ferroll falls back a step for her to enter, and jerks his arms up above his head with a gesture that is pregnant with wrath and despair.

‘It should never have come to this. Ferroll, be a *man*, and alter it all now, even now,’ she pleads earnestly, as a haggard wife and a flock of gaunt children crowd round her. Then she adds rapidly: ‘The time is short, I must say all I have to say quickly, but understand me with your *heart*, and everything will be well again——’

‘Never with me, Miss Darragh; never with me——’

‘Yes; things will be well with you again if you are “well”

with yourself.' Ferroll's groan as she says this startles her, but she goes on, 'Mr. Annesley is coming presently in no impatient spirit, but he is a man who will not submit to being ruined by you and others like you, who fancy you're callous about being ruined yourselves. He is coming backed up by the soldiers, but he will send them away and take your word if you will promise to work the land, and when it repays you—to pay him.'

The red light that came into Ferroll's eyes as she says this reminds her of the starving bloodhound outside.

'I'd have paid him before this, Miss Darragh—if—my hand had been steadier,' he mutters, and then he crouches down on some sacks by a half-opened closet-door.

'Maybe I'll pay him yet,' he goes on; 'coming with the soldiers, is he? And they'll search the house, and I hope they'll like what they find.'

He says these last words with a choking laugh that is inexpressibly painful to listen to.

'Ferroll,' Darragh says, laying her hand on his arm as fearlessly as she had held it out to the fierce, hungry bloodhound, 'the soldiers are not the police, and if they were, they have no right to, and no reason for, searching your house. Keep your right to have it for your very own; meet Mr. Annesley as a friend, and he will be very patient; *work*, and bring things back to the old way. What is that?'

Something glittering falls from a corner of the half-opened closet in which he has been groping for the last few seconds—falls at her feet; and as she stoops and picks it up before he can dart upon it, she recognizes the likeness of the widowed Lady Killeen, set round with a circle of diamonds of price, from which circle one stone is missing, and it darts into her memory that Killeen always wore it.

In a moment the senseless trinket becomes an accusing agent, telling its tale with terrible accuracy to the horror-stricken girl.

‘You’ve saved the soldiers the trouble, Miss Darragh,’ Ferroll says, with savage sadness; ‘they’ll not be like to believe that I was passing by the road that night’ (he can’t repress a shudder as he says this), ‘and the gims were lying there on his breast asking to be taken up——’

‘Corney!’ his wife screams warningly, ‘you were not by the road that night; some one gave the “jule” to you, and you were tempted to keep it to sell for bread—you were never by the road that night.’

‘Did I say I was?’ he asks savagely; and then, with a cry that is an execration, he starts forward to tear the jewel from Darragh’s hand, as he hears the tramp of many feet outside; but Darragh springs aside, passes the door and the bloodhound, and, holding the trinket firmly in her hand, says rapidly to Robert Annesley and Captain Mack-iver:

‘I have found *this* in the house of the man I came to try to help and to save; my cousin always wore it. It must have been taken from him after the murder, while *you* were insensible, before Dolly and I found him. The man who shot him must have taken it, and I found it in Ferroll’s house. Poor Kathleen’s lover will be saved.’

CHAPTER XXIX.

‘IF DARRAGH MARRIES!’

FERROLL is not the type of man who commits himself through garrulity. He submits to being taken into custody and charged with being accessory to the murder of Lord

Killeen in morose silence. Fortunately for him, also, his wife's utterances do not legally strengthen the act of accusation against him.

For in her first wild distress at seeing the partner with whom she has shared a few of the ups and a countless number of the downs of life in the hands of the police, the poor woman raves indiscreetly.

Raves of what she said and thought, feared and advised, when he 'came home that wicked night and showed her the "jule," and told her that it would bring bread to her and her children by-and-by, and swore that he had found it in a certain field miles away from where the murder was.' Raves of her own fearful disbelief in the truth of that to which he swore, and of her prayers that he would seek for an owner for the bright, dangerous thing that has brought this disgrace upon them now, 'through his having kept it against my word to him to look for an owner for it—all through *that*,' the poor wife cries frantically, putting the fact away from her for the present that her husband is 'taken' for a far more serious offence than the detention of the jewel.

As they march away with their prisoner through the unsavoury yard, they are met by a vast crowd of law-breaking, reckless, savage, hungry, and whisky-maddened men and women. The former are armed with all sorts of destructive but ignoble weapons—scythes, frying-pans, pokers, bludgeons, jagged-edged pieces of broken crockery ware. Each and all of these are good enough for the purpose of battering in the heads of the executants of the laws of order and honesty.

The first impression given to the minds of this rabble by the sight of Ferroll in charge of the police, who are protected by the soldiery, is that he is being torn from his home and family to gratify the revengeful spirit of a rapacious English landlord. But presently the truth leaks out, and at once

there is a fierce but badly-concerted raid made upon the myrmidons of the law, in the futile effort to rescue him.

A policeman is killed by a well-directed flint cutting open his head and burying itself in his brain. Robert Annesley's horse is shot under him, and the right arms of several of the soldiers are rendered helpless from being broken by furious blows from pokers, or from diabolical cuts from scythes. It is in vain that two priests, who have commanded something like attention and respect in the district on account of their simple piety and unfeigned love of souls, place themselves between the lawless aggressors and those in whom reasonable authority is vested. It is in vain that in the name of their outraged God and Church they call upon their people to desist. A voice is heard to cry out :

'Stone them out ! this is no place for priests ; this is no time to listen to their words,' and at the words a hundred hands are raised in violence against the persons that have been held sacred until this calamity has come to pass.

Still temperately and manfully the English officers refrain from giving the order to fire, though the soldiers are praying for permission to do so, as they see their comrades falling mutilated around them in this foul fray. And still persistently they press onward through the concourse of desperate wretches, bearing their prisoner with them.

But there is an end to temperate forbearance when, with a wild rush, a gang closes in round Darragh Thynne, separating her from her friends by such a sudden movement, made with such skill and unanimity, that Captain Mackiver knows it must have been agreed upon beforehand. There is an end to temperate forbearance when this happens, and further endurance would be criminal, when one of the head-centres of this savagery cries out :

‘Till Ferroll is set free, boys, we have a hostage, and as he is saved so shall the lady be.’

A few voices are raised in feeble explanation and expostulation.

‘Sure it’s Miss Darragh! *she* must be let go without a hand on her; it isn’t Miss Darragh that’s our enemy.’

‘It’s through Miss Darragh that I’m here now,’ Ferroll yells out, and then as the easily-swayed, fantastic, fickle, fierce, vain throng groan and execrate her, Captain Mackiver despairingly gives the longed-for order, and his troops fire.

A dozen men drop where they stand or crouch, and the rest are panic-stricken for the few moments that are required to rush in among them and bring Darragh out from their cruel, cowardly midst. Then into the thick of the fray, well-mounted and habited, looking beautiful and wealthy enough to be the Queen of Connaught, rides Mrs. O’Leary, and the rabble rally round her as, in clear, ringing accent, she asks them to ‘cease from resistance that can be of no avail to-day, and to reserve their courage and their strength for a better organized struggle.’

‘Aren’t you sorry that you can’t arrest me for sedition, conspiracy, and rebellion?’ she says, riding up to Captain Mackiver, and laying her whip lightly across his arm. ‘It must be annoying to you that, as a matter of fact, I have quelled a riot that *you* were powerless to put down?’

‘As a matter of fact it is a repulsive spectacle to me to see a woman mixed up in these affairs at all,’ he says, with ill-disguised dislike to her.

‘Nonsense!’ she says good-temperedly (Mrs. O’Leary is always good-tempered in prosperity, and she is growing very prosperous out of Ireland’s woes). ‘Nonsense! your own Darragh was “mixed up” in these affairs long before I was; she has ratted now,’ she continues loudly, turning towards

the sea of upturned ghastly faces, and in response to her remark there rises a sullen muttered roar. Darragh would fare ill at their hands were she in their power at this moment.

It is Mrs. O'Leary's way to be deferential to priests, and some remnant of what was at one time perhaps real religious feeling actuates her when she comes face to face with them; and now, as she rides up and ranges herself alongside of the two who have been maltreated by the populace, she infuses a good deal of respectful sympathy into her bearing.

'If I had been sooner this would not have happened, Father O'Shane; but it shows you how powerless the armed English authority is to deal with the question and the country now: brute-force will never subdue your countrymen, nor will it teach them to be industrious and happy!'

Loyal as they are to their countrymen, the bruised and baffled priests say with truth and justice that all the exhibitions of brute-force which they have seen lately have been made by the 'patriotic faction,' and then they go on to deplore and denounce the godlessness which is the root of all the evil.

But the pretty Parnellite, who is profiting so pleasantly by the occasion, will not listen to aught of this. Rather she prefers to tickle their humane, fellow-creature-loving ears with her tale of being on the committee of the Relief Fund, and of the zeal with which she means to go forth to the work of succouring the victims of oppression.

'My life, my time, and such poor gifts as I have, shall be devoted to the work,' she tells them, and as she does not think it necessary to add that 'the work' which in her estimation is of paramount importance is the aggrandizement of Mrs. O'Leary, these good men are taken in by her,

and commend her greatly, as many another good man has been and done in her clever untrustworthy past.

It is a sad going back to the Annesleys' home this day for poor Darragh Thynne. She has proved it now—proved it perilously in her own person—that the people among whom she has been born and bred, the people among whom her father and mother and her mother's race have spent their lives and time, their brains and hearts and *money* for generations, regard her and her safety no more than they would that of one of the beasts that perish, now that for their own sakes she strives to stem the torrent of their evil-doing.

'They would have seen me shot,' she says, with a short dry sob, as she rides along on Ronald's horse, with Robert Annesley on one side of her and Captain Mackiver the other, on their way back to Darragh.

'And then some one of them with more poetic feeling and better brains than the rest of the herd would have written a poem about you, and set it to one of Moore's melodies,' Captain Mackiver says contemptuously; and then he adds fervently:

'Thank heaven! the glamour is no longer over you; you see them as "they are" at last.'

'Not as they are by nature,' she says quickly, 'but as they are through the ill-advice of those who trade on what is noblest and best in the Irish character to turn it to ill account, to slay them with shafts tipped with feathers plucked from their own gallant breasts.'

'I don't believe one "gallant" heart beats among the miscreants,' Captain Mackiver says; and Darragh tells him that many a perfect musical instrument gives forth jarring strains when struck by ignorant and cruel hands, that many a beautiful poem is marred in the reading, and that many a

blessing is being wrested from Ireland now by the blind or perfidious policy of her ruinously false friends.

Their coming home together in this familiar and unconventional way does not add to poor, anxious, harassed Dolly's peace of mind or hilarity of spirit. While they have been out doing and daring together, she has been at home taking counsel as to various petty and narrowing ways and means with Powles, who still remains faithful, though she has little to cook and less to eat in these days.

It is a pleasant thing to rear and kill one's own poultry when one knows that the stock can be replenished at pleasure, but it is a depressing thing to make away not only with one's plump pullets, but one's tough old cocks and hens, when one reflects that on their coming to an end an enforced fast must ensue.

In the excitement and misery consequent upon her lover's arrest and imprisonment, Kathleen has ceased to purvey for them. The poor girl can do nothing but hang around the prison doors and pour forth passionate protestations and asseverations as to his innocence to any one who will listen to her and may help her.

And the one who listens most patiently and promises help most encouragingly to the distraught Claddagh girl at this juncture is Mrs. O'Leary.

But she exacts payment for her partisanship.

'If I am to help you,' she says severely, when she has given a promise to have a petition 'for the poor boy who never did the murder at all, Mrs. O'Leary,' sent up to some mysterious person in authority; 'if I am to help you in your heart's desire, Kathleen, you must help me in mine; you must go to Darragh just as usual, and you must bring me word of what goes on there, especially of what goes on between Miss Darragh and Captain Mackiver.'

‘The saints look down upon me and forgive me for being a spy upon her,’ Kathleen says piously; and Mrs. O’Leary says impatiently—

‘The saints are more likely to look leniently upon that perfidy than upon anything like lukewarmness towards your lover. Be a sensible girl. You like going to Darragh; what harm can there be in your telling me what they are doing there, if there is no harm in what they do?’

‘It’s a spy I’ll be,’ poor Kathleen drawls out unwillingly. She longs to buy freedom and security for her lover, but the price she is asked to pay for making the effort to gain these things is a heavy one.

‘There’s no disgrace in being a spy when you only want to spy out something that may turn out to be for the good of those you love,’ Mrs. O’Leary says speciously. ‘Lord Killeen has a great deal of power, and he will use that power to get your sweetheart released if you get me certain information that he wants.’

‘Is it anything against Miss Darragh? If it’s to harm her I’ll not get it.’

‘Be an obstinate girl and see your lover perish, then,’ Mrs. O’Leary says angrily. ‘I only ask you to go there and find out if there’s any love-making going on between Miss Darragh and Captain Mackiver. It’s nothing “against” her if there is; but Lord Killeen would like to know it.’

‘Is it Mr. Arthur that’s jealous?’

‘He’s not Mr. Arthur any longer, remember, and he’s not jealous at all; he’s very fond of Miss Darragh in a kind, cousinly sort of way, but he’s not in love with her. And he’s not going to marry her; I think he would like to know that she was going to marry Captain Mackiver and be happy.’

So Kathleen is persuaded to go up to Darragh, and to a certain extent she possesses herself of Miss Thynne’s con-

fidence. But Mrs. O'Leary is very little the wiser for what transpires at the interview. So much as Kathleen tells her is strictly true, but she does not think herself bound to tell the whole truth.

'Deed then, ma'am, Miss Darragh is unhappy enough to make Mr. Ar——, his lordship's heart ache for her, if he's fond of her in the kind, cousinly way still, and that's about all I have to tell you.'

'What should make her unhappy?' Mrs. O'Leary asks contemptuously; 'her poor cousin has left her a much larger fortune than she ever had a right to expect——'

'Her ladyship, Miss Darragh's mamma, meant the old place for her,' the Claddagh girl hints proudly.

'And his lordship, Miss Darragh's papa, left it to his nephew instead,' Mrs. O'Leary says, laughing. 'On the whole, Miss Darragh may consider herself a very lucky girl; she can afford to marry the man she loves now.'

Kathleen keeps a discreet silence.

'Do you think she *will* marry Captain Mackiver?' Mrs. O'Leary says wilyly. 'It would ease Lord Killeen's mind about her *so* much if he knew she was going to be safe with such a good man as Captain Mackiver.'

'You may ease his lordship's mind by telling him that she'll soon be safely away from the old country; but she didn't tell me she was going to marry Captain Mackiver,' Kathleen says, with unwonted caution, born of her loyal love for Darragh. She does not know what is in this lady's mind about Miss Thynne, but she suspects that it is something that will not bear inspection under the clear light of day.

'Maybe she means his honour's lordship for herself,' Kathleen thinks. 'Phew! she to be in Miss Darragh's place with him! Not one word shall she get out of me

about Miss Darragh's marriage, for I don't believe she'll ever be married at all.'

But clever Mrs. O'Leary finds abundance of piquant food wherewith to regale Lord Killeen out of the apparently scanty materials set forth for her use by Kathleen, when that able but rather credulous young nobleman next calls upon her.

It is true that she has not obeyed his injunctions with regard to keeping her name out of the papers, but she trusts to her rarely-failing charm to make him forget this fact.

'Is it true that you rode down to Ferroll's and encouraged the mob the day that ruffian was taken?' Lord Killeen asks reproachfully, and she puts an infinity of pathos into the tones in which she replies—

'How one *does* get misrepresented by those *vile* newspaper people, and misunderstood even by those whom one calls friends! I went down in fear of my life to use the influence *you* have taught me how to gain with these people, to induce them to submit to legal—though unjust—authority. I saved your cousin Darragh from rough usage——'

'*Darragh!* Roughly used her! By heaven! the devils shall pay for it.'

'Hush! hush! she found that wretched trinket in Ferroll's house and built up at once a theory of his being the murderer; it was such unreasoning "avidity to condemn" on her part, you can't wonder that the popular mind revolted against her. Besides, then she was ranging herself visibly with Captain Mackiver, who represents the oppressors; you can't wonder that the people's love turned to hate——'

'I wonder at your defending such devilry.'

'They only fought, poor things! they scarcely fought, but struggled for freedom. Why should they have relinquished the struggle for the sake of putting a smooth face on things

before a girl who is ready to relinquish *everything* for the sake of a man who is here with the intention of shooting them down if they infringe on his notions of right?

'Darragh isn't going to marry Mackiver, is she?' Lord Killeen asks uneasily, and Mrs. O'Leary throws an air of perfect conviction into her answer—

'She has the grace to keep her intention quiet, but she has not deceived Kathleen, and, to do Kathleen justice, *she* has not deceived me.'

'If Darragh marries that fellow I'll never believe in a woman again,' he says, striking the table with his open palm angrily. Then Mrs. O'Leary soothes him, telling him that the wisest women are 'weak where they love,' and bidding him remember that 'other women are ready to share and elevate his fortunes though Darragh has failed.'

'I hope the Scotchman will not have the opportunity of triumphing over you,' she says meditatively. 'I have it in my heart to hope that you will have found a panacea for the loss of Darragh before he is in a position to proclaim his conquest over you to the world.'

CHAPTER XXX.

IN PERFECT FAITH.

It must be admitted that if Lord Killeen and Mrs. O'Leary are rather at sea about Darragh, poor Darragh is considerably more at sea about herself just now.

In common humanity to Dolly, she (Darragh) cannot depart yet, and in common humanity to Captain Mackiver she feels that she ought not to stay. For he builds up false

hopes about her on false premisses, telling himself that she is too absolutely free from the weakness of coquetting to remain winning him hourly to love her more and more, unless she means eventually to relent and realise his cherished dreams concerning her.

He has a real, valid reason for being daily at Darragh, for the presence of his men on the property and in the neighbourhood is absolutely necessary for the preservation of order and the protection of life. Urged on by fluent-tongued members of the Land League, the malcontents in every part of the country are rising now in a more openly avowed spirit of rebellion than they have dared to display heretofore, and the 'Property Defence Association and Emergency Committee' would be overpowered by their work if they caused the arrest of even half the number of evil-disposed and disorderly persons who are making the beautiful, fairest 'flower of the earth and first gem of the sea' an earthly hell.

There are times when, carried away by the excitement of the history that is being enacted around her, Darragh actually forgets that Ronald Mackiver is in love with her; and whenever she does this there comes into her manner such a frank and cordial reliant friendliness that Ronald feels he can be happy and satisfied with this, and nothing more, if it will only last.

Sometimes it occurs to him that there is something cruel in the unavoidable and unalterable circumstances which are throwing him so constantly in Dolly's way. This conviction does not arise from anything in Dolly's bearing towards him, for the girl guards her looks and tones rigidly, and never permits a glance or word to escape her that may not be freely accorded to a comrade and old acquaintance. No one but herself is permitted to see the pain which is gnawing at her heart, for she loves Ronald as tenderly as

ever ; and when he looks at Darragh, Dolly discerns that he forgets the former love ever existed.

Captain Mackiver is still ignorant of the fact of Darragh's engagement to her cousin, Lord Killeen, having come to an end ; and, as the subject is an exquisitely painful one to him, he abstains from making any remarks about it, and so hears nothing. One day, however, he has occasion to call at Mrs. O'Leary's house in order to utter a warning which he has been commissioned to give by a friendly magistrate, who has been applied to by some members of the Anti-Land League on the subject of putting a check on Mrs. O'Leary.

'She must stop that haranguing,' he says to Captain Mackiver. 'I don't want to have her arrested, but she collected a crowd and created a disturbance in the Claddagh yesterday ; she was urging them to attack the gaol and rescue that young fellow before the trial, who's in for poor Killeen's murder. Now, I don't want to do anything violent, for she's a pretty woman, and a wise woman too, I think. You know her, don't you ? I wish you'd call and caution her.'

'I think she's making a great fool of herself, and that a check would do her a considerable amount of good,' Ronald says : nevertheless, he accepts the task.

She is at home, alone, and disengaged, and without delay Captain Mackiver is admitted to her presence.

'So you have found me out, oh ! mine enemy,' she says playfully.

'Unquestionably I have found you out, but I object to the second part of your sentence. I am not your enemy ; I have come here to-day, as you'll understand presently, in the character of your guide, philosopher, and friend.'

'In other words, you have come to lecture me about my

evil courses ; having converted Miss Thynne to your English view of Irish things, you are going to try your hand on me ?’

‘ I am not responsible for Miss Thynne’s moderated views, I assure you,’ he says, rather coldly, for he dislikes hearing Darragh’s dear name taken in vain by this woman whom he distrusts ; ‘ and I’m not anxious to make you see things from my stand-point ; but I have been requested to suggest to you that, as you value your liberty, you will do well to abstain from inflaming the people, as you did yesterday, for instance.’

‘ I do value my “ Liberty.” See, I have one of his high-art Indian silks on now,’ she says, laughing, and holding out a fold of soft olive-green silk for Ronald’s inspection, and then she goes on to pronounce an eloquent panegyric upon Liberty’s great high-art and Eastern emporium in Regent Street, in the vain hope of leading Captain Mackiver’s mind away from the matter on which he has come.

‘ You won’t find them good prison wear,’ he says, when she has finished.

‘ You’re not going to war upon women, are you ? That will be cowardly,’ she says.

‘ Upon such women as you, yes ; for you are as plucky and as dangerous as any man.’

‘ Praise from Captain Mackiver ! I am flattered ; well, what is it that you want me to promise ?’

‘ Merely, for your own sake, to keep clear of the insurrectionary movement : you’re not an Irishwoman, you don’t care a brass farthing for Ireland’s wrongs or rights, and you *do* care very much for the safety and comfort of your pretty person. Be advised by me : back out of the movement with your usual grace and discretion.’

‘ I am not an Irishwoman, but I am going to be the wife

of an Irishman, and bear an Irish title : you'll acknowledge that gives me a stake in Ireland's honour and prosperity ?'

'Which you and your colleagues, male and female, are doing your best to destroy. However, I can say no more ; I've given my warning, and now all that remains for me to do is to congratulate you on your engagement. Who is the happy man ?'

'Can't you guess ?'

'Honestly, no ! I have been out of the world a good deal since my accident, and have heard nothing of what is going on.'

'And they don't speak of it out there ?' she asks, nodding her head in the direction of Darragh.

'I have not heard the Annesleys mention you since I have been there this time.'

'Poor Mr. Annesley ! I'm afraid he looks upon me as a vessel of wrath because I had to leave them rather suddenly when this business called me to Paris. Will it surprise you to hear that the man I am going to marry is Lord Killeen ?'

'Impossible !' he cries out, incredulous, relieved, and annoyed at the same time.

'On the contrary, not only possible, but probable ; and not only probable, but certain,' she says vauntingly. 'Oh ! I see what it is—you are galled that another man has been able to cast off Darragh's fetters. Let me assure you that Lord Killeen's engagement to his cousin was broken off before he made love to me ; you ought to judge him leniently, for you are a fellow-sinner, I understand.'

'You have astonished me more than I can express,' he says, rising to go, and ignoring her allusion to himself. 'Let me urge you now, for Lord Killeen's sake, as well as your own, not to do anything rash.' Then he holds his hand out and wishes her good-bye, and goes away with his

head and heart in a whirl about this alleged rupture between Darragh and Lord Killeen.

‘Now that we are both free she will not put an obstacle that does not exist between us any longer,’ he tells himself, and he almost blesses Mrs. O’Leary for having won Lord Killeen away from all possibility of ever seeking Darragh as his wife again.

Meanwhile Mrs. O’Leary is busy mentally calculating the cost of her bold stroke.

In asserting that she is going to be the wife of Lord Killeen she has stated more than the facts of the case warrant as it stands. The truth is that Lord Killeen has not asked her to be his wife, has never hinted at such being his ambition. But he has flattered her, and flirted with her, and Mrs. O’Leary relies on her own skill in making flattery and flirtation lead to an offer of marriage. She means to be his wife, in fact, therefore her conscience assails her for having been rather premature in announcing to Captain Mackiver that she is to be Lady Killeen.

A great deal, she feels, depends on the merest chance. If Captain Mackiver mentions to many people that ‘Killeen and Mrs. O’Leary are engaged,’ the report will get rolled over and over, and will grow to such dimensions that it will assume importance. Moreover, after passing through many mouths, and being rolled trippingly off the tongues of, say, a dozen people, it will be hard for any one to trace it back to her.

‘And when once it becomes gossip Killeen must be made to feel that I am compromised by such a report unless he justifies it,’ she says, laughing at the idea of her character suffering through such innocent scandal. ‘He is a gentleman; if he feels or fancies that I am injured through his “injudicious” attentions, he’s safe to offer me

"all the reparation in his power," and that means that I shall be Lady Killeen.'

But, on the other hand, if Captain Mackiver meets with Lord Killeen now at once and quotes Mrs. O'Leary on the subject, much mischief may be done to that enterprising woman's schemes of self-aggrandizement, and much ignominy may overtake her. However, fortune proverbially favours the bold, and her most bitter enemy cannot deny that she is bold even to recklessness.

As she sits alone, meditating over the contingent possibilities which are before her, it flashes into her mind that, even if she achieves this aim, marries Lord Killeen, and gains a good place in the world, and a status in fashionable society, she will not be happier or more restful than she is at present.

'I know I shall want a change soon—not the poor little change from his London house to his country seat, but a change that *will* bring risk and *may* bring ruin; and there will be so many things that "Lady Killeen" may not do with impunity: but I shall do them all the same; there'll be risk and excitement in that. "Lady Killeen!" That poor propriety-soddened Scotchman's face was good when I told him that I was going to marry an "Irishman and bear an Irish title."'

She is expecting Lord Killeen to call this afternoon, and she works herself up to that pitch of agitation when expectancy becomes intolerable and a tragic climax would be welcome in place of suspense. Nevertheless, when she hears first the ring, and then his footstep in the hall, she feels a creepy sensation crawling over her, and knows that she is turning to what Eastern country people call 'goose-flesh.'

'If he has met that man Mackiver and heard that he is

to marry me from him, the cause is up !' she says, in the few moments that elapse before Lord Killeen—unconscious of her disquiet and its cause — comes buoyantly into the room.

His hands are full of telegrams, for there is a row going on in the House about the protection of Irish landlords' rights and the wrongs of the Irish disaffected. Honourable members have been using strong language—the words 'mendacious' and 'lying' have been freely flung about by Ireland's intemperate advocates, and a great leader has openly declared that landlord blood will be freely spilt if land, life, and liberty are to be protected by law and force in Ireland.

'I must go back at once,' he says animatedly. 'I'm announced to address a meeting in Hyde Park three days from now. I wish you could be there.'

'Why can I not ?' she says deliberately. 'Your interests are mine, your cause is dear to me as it is to you ; why, if I can be of use *there*, should I stay here in idleness ?'

'But you're a brick of a woman to say that,' he replies admiringly ; and she gathers from his tone that the hour has come.

'Why should I not go with you to encourage and stimulate you, if I can do these things ? Who am I that I should hesitate to sacrifice myself ? Besides, we must submit to being talked about ; the cruel world will not credit us with being friends.'

'The cruel world will find itself very much mistaken if it links our names together in any way that is distressing to you,' he says hotly ; and she subdues herself, and laughs sadly, and tells him that she 'does not mind, but that only this afternoon Captain Mackiver spoke with her of her engagement to Lord Killeen.'

‘Let us turn the idle gossip into sober truth. Shall we?’ he says; and Mrs. O’Leary rises and holds out her hand to him.

‘Is it your heart speaking, or only your honour?’ she asks; and he assures her that his heart has led him and that his head justifies his heart’s choice.

‘For my own happiness’ sake I will believe you,’ she says softly; ‘for it will make me very happy to be with you and to share your work; but I am not vain enough to believe that I can obliterate the memory of your beautiful first love.’

‘You mean Darragh?’

‘Yes. Darragh will always stand between me and the thorough conviction that your heart is entirely mine. Let me warn you, Killeen; it is only fair to tell you that I am a very jealous woman.’

‘You have the power to keep a man’s thoughts even away from every other woman when once he has seen you,’ he says gallantly: for as he has impulsively committed himself to the promise of marrying her he is determined to be very proud of her, and to make his pride and satisfaction patent to all men.

‘And I shall be very exacting,’ she goes on, uttering unpleasant truths so winningly that the threat of future tyranny sounds quite prettily in his ears. ‘I shall insist upon sharing all your risks and dangers, on accompanying you everywhere; will that weary and bore you? will my devotion be an encumbrance?’

‘You will be my inspiration, my fellow-worker, my best aid as well as my wife.’

‘And you will never suffer yourself to be turned against me by evil report?’

‘The man does not live who would dare to utter one against you to me.’

‘But the women do; and you can’t fight a woman for uttering lying and malignant slanders.’

‘I can’t fight them, but I fancy I can silence them. But why raise these ghosts?’

‘Because I know the world and men well, and there will be many who will try to come between us when they hear that the wealthy and powerful Lord Killeen is going to marry a comparatively poor and unknown woman.’

‘They will be bold and bad indeed if they try to come between my wife and me.’

‘But I am not your wife yet, and you are going away from me, and how do I know whom you will see and what you will hear in London? I can’t help raising ghosts, and seeing shadows; I feel prophetic. If you go to London without me, you will never see me again.’

‘Then I will not go without you; come with me, and be happy.’

‘Do you mean that you will marry me at once before you start?’

‘I mean that. It would weaken my words and make me practically useless if I left you feeling that my absence made you nervous and anxious; I can rely on myself and my own fidelity, but I can’t rely on your reliance on me; so you must put up with a quiet, hurried wedding, and prepare to start immediately after it.’

She buries her face in her hands, and thinks deeply about many things for a minute or two before she answers him. The step he proposes will secure her safety and give her a good status, whatever happens. But will evil fate ever compel her to repent taking it? If people will only let her and her past alone, she will make Killeen a good, loving, faithful wife. But if they bring rumours and suspicions to him, and he exhibits vexation or pain about them, then her

patience may become exhausted and she may commit fresh follies in sheer reckless desperation.

‘I say to you what Vivien said to Merlin, “Trust me not at all, or all in all,”’ she says suddenly, lifting her face from her hands, and a glow in which there is both belief and love suffuses her face as he replies :

‘All in all. And now I must see a priest about our marriage to-morrow morning.’

There are no obstacles in their way. They are made man and wife without further let or hindrance, and are well on their way to England before the whisper that they are married is heard in Galway.

The new Lady Killeen writes paragraphs to the effect that Lord and Lady Killeen are at the Grosvenor Hotel for a week or ten days previous to their return to Ireland, and despatches them to the several London society papers. She also writes a picturesque description of herself, and forwards it to her quondam friend, Mrs. St. John, with a request that the influential and gifted lady will get it inserted as from herself in a widely read journal. Having thus flung down the gauntlet, she nerves herself to the task of waiting calmly to see whether gossip will pick it up or not.

There is a large assemblage to hear and encourage Lord Killeen in Hyde Park, and as he advocates order and discretion, and speaks with good temper and good sense, the meeting passes off peacefully. After it he goes to his club, where his wife is to pick him up at a later hour. Awaiting him he finds a note from Mrs. St. John, written apparently under the influence of great agitation and excitement.

‘Let *nothing* prevent your coming to see me *immediately* on receipt of this ; it is of the utmost importance to *yourself* that I see *you* without delay.’

So he leaves a line for her ladyship telling her where he has gone, and bidding her follow him.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A THANKLESS OFFICE.

THERE is a feeling that almost amounts to dismay in the Annesleys' household one morning when Darragh announces that business calls her back to London peremptorily.

She is a woman of property now, and they have no right to dispute the fact. Still, Dolly suspects that some other than a monetary consideration is at the bottom of the hasty move.

'I shall miss you more than I can say. In spite of all the unhappiness that has fallen upon you here, you have been the one gleam of brightness in our life of the last few weeks,' Dolly says, after pleading in vain that Darragh will prolong her visit.

'And you are more than good to say it,' Darragh replies; 'but even if I could do the great good of making things even temporarily pleasanter for you by staying here a little longer, I ought to go now; it's a more imperative need calls me away—believe me that it is.'

'And you're going, leaving Ronald still hanging between hope and despair—still in uncertainty. Poor Ronald!'

'He is not in uncertainty, and he has given up the foolish hope that I shall ever be his wife. Dolly, be sensible. If I had been weak enough to realise that hope, Ronald and I would both have been very miserable, and in time, as remorse had its own way more and more with us, we should

have come to respect each other less. It's best for me as it is.'

Dolly shakes her head.

'It's hard that he can't be made happy,' she says gravely, and then she asks : 'Won't you tell me why you're going to leave us, Darragh? I know that I shall have it suggested to me by Marian that you're going back to win Lord Portbank again; but I won't believe that.'

'I'm going to discharge a debt,' Darragh says lightly. 'When I've done that, and had it receipted in the way I want, I'll tell you what my plans are.'

'Shall you settle in Ireland?'

'I shall go where—I'm ordered.'

'But you're your own mistress now, dear Darragh, and how I love your cousin's memory for having made you so! The ten thousand pounds is yours to do what you please with, and you will have a home of your own; will it be in Ireland?'

Darragh smiles happily.

'Yes; the ten thousand is absolutely my own, to do what I like with, and I mean to do well with it. Poor dear Killeen did many a good and generous thing, but never a better and more generous one than this of leaving me this money.'

'Will you go and see Marian?' Dolly asks.

'Yes; though the sight will give me no pleasure. I shall feel I'm looking upon the very incarnation of selfishness.'

'You may be able to persuade her to come over here. Robert feels hurt at the apathy she displays about him and his affairs, little as he says about it. Convince her that she will run no personal risk in coming, and make her understand that she will ruin Robert by keeping up that town house; and please say as little as you can about Captain

Mackiver being here, or I shall have a tirade from her about my "mean-spiritedness" in being civil to him, "after the way he has behaved to me." I know all Marian's phrases on the subject by heart, and I don't want to hear or read them again.'

'I'll take care not to bring any of her little ungenerous sentiments upon you ; and I'll make her feel ashamed of not being here to bear the brunt of it with your brother,' Darragh says ; and just then Robert Annesley comes in, frightened with the great news of Lord Killeen's sudden and private marriage to Mrs. O'Leary.

'Poor dear Arthur ! it shan't be my fault if people don't think well of his wife and be kind to her,' Darragh says at once. 'Gone to London, are they ? This is an additional reason for my going there too, and being friendly with her.'

'I thought you didn't like Mrs. O'Leary?' Dolly says.

'Nor did I ; but she is Lady Killeen now, my cousin's wife ; and Arthur and I have always trusted one another so thoroughly. I've my work in London now, Dolly ; you mustn't try to keep me another day.'

So Darragh goes, without exchanging those last words with Captain Mackiver which he has been hoping against hope to have.

The girl has acted sorely against her own inclination and with great judgment in avoiding a parting interview with Ronald. She knows very well that if he openly presses his suit upon her with Dolly's knowledge that Dolly will aid and abet him ; will, indeed, put Darragh's firm rejection of him in such a light that it would look like cruel and unreasonable obstinacy. Besides, their united efforts to subdue her to Ronald's wishes will be hard to resist, and Darragh has made up her mind to resist to the end.

So she goes away one morning suddenly, without giving Dolly the opportunity of apprising Captain Mackiver of her departure ; and when she is gone Ronald comes to the place more frequently than ever to talk about her to Dolly, which is only fair, as will be seen, when it becomes known how she (Darragh) is occupied in talking about them just now.

There is, as Dolly suspects, another motive than the monetary one at the bottom of this hasty move of Miss Thynne's. It has occurred to her that she can negotiate with the Mackiver family, and make fair and happy terms for Dolly through the instrumentality of her ten thousand pounds.

Feeling sure of a kind reception, she drives straight to the Thornes' on her arrival in town, and is puzzled to find herself greeted with a torrent of good wishes and reproaches—simultaneously uttered.

'Darling ! I am so glad, but it *was* mean not to let us know about it,' Mrs. Thorne cries, kissing her rapturously. Then, before Darragh can question or explain, Mrs. Thorne runs to her husband's study, and calls out—

'Come and see Lady Killeen at once. She has remembered us at last.'

'What *are* you talking about ?' Darragh asks. Then she remembers the notice of her cousin's marriage, and understands the situation in a moment.

'You think that Arthur and I are married—you think I am the Lady Killeen who is staying at the Grosvenor ; now, don't be disgusted with me, or with anyone else, when I tell you you're mistaken, but just put on your bonnet and come with me to call on my cousin's wife.'

'Who is she ?' Mrs. Thorne asks ; and Darragh replies—

'She is Lady Killeen.'

‘I mean, who was she?’

‘She was a Mrs. O’Leary,’ Darragh says quietly; and then, as she observes Mrs. Thorne compressing her lips, she adds—

‘And if I can help to make her married life a happy one I’ll do it—and you’ll help me, won’t you?’

‘My dear Darragh! She—I mean, my husband tells me she is a very odd sort of person.’

‘Perhaps she is; but if you love me, don’t you be one of those who’ll try to point out her oddness.’

‘I never undertake to godmother questionable women,’ Mrs. Thorne says, drawing herself up to virtuous heights, from which Darragh draws her down by saying sorrowfully:

‘I shall have to fight popular prejudice single-handed then! I did rely on your being on my side; if any slight is offered to her it will be offered to me, for Lord Killeen’s honour is very dear to me.’

‘And he has imperilled it for that woman,’ Mrs. Thorne says with a slightly artificial shiver.

‘Which observation may be made by malicious people about every man who marries,’ Darragh says, striving to speak unconcernedly. Then she gives over the effort, and allows her anger at the injustice of many things to display itself.

‘She has been a foolish woman lately about politics; socially, you know no more of her than I do, and I know nothing. Why are you not as ready to receive her and add her to your list of summer acquaintances as you are to receive and visit ladies who have been very publicly aspersed and very scantily vindicated?’

‘I wouldn’t have a woman on my visiting list who wasn’t received by the highest lady in the land—or by her daughter-in-law,’ Mrs. Thorne says amiably; for she knows that the stand she is taking is a safe one.

‘Lady Killeen will be received by the highest lady in the land—or by her deputy ; why demur about her?’

‘I don’t demur ; I only mean to wait and see what other people do ; I am not a Donna Quixote, and, on the other hand, I am not a rigid Mrs. Grundy : understand that, Darragh ; your cousin’s wife will not find a foe in me, even if she does not find a firm friend.’

‘That is to say, you’ll remain neutral just so long as her position is uncertain ; if she is accepted by the *very* upper of the upper ten you will follow their lead, and if they snub her you will be with them in that line of conduct also ? I don’t call yours a frank or fearless policy by any means.’

‘But it’s a safe one, Darragh,’ Mrs. Thorne says laughingly. The woman of the world loves Darragh Thynne and wishes to keep well with her, but she loves the integrity of her own position in society still more, and is not to be beguiled into imperilling it, either by coaxing or scolding on the girl’s part.

‘It may be “safe,” but I have rather a contempt for masterly inactivity when any one’s honour or happiness is at stake,’ Darragh retorts.

‘My dearest girl, I’m not conceited enough to suppose that anything I may do will affect the honour and happiness of Lord Killeen ; as for her ladyship, she must fight her own battles, for most assuredly I won’t fight them for her.’

‘But you’ll never go out of your way to throw a pebble at her ?’ Darragh pleads, and Mrs. Thorne says :

‘No ; I’ll leave that for some of her professed friends ; she’ll be envied a good deal for having achieved a title, and the woman who is *envied* in London life ought to be irreproachable.’

‘And we don’t know that she is not that,’ Darragh contends. Then she goes to prepare herself for that visit to

Lady Killeen, which she means to be taken by all men as a sign of her faith in the propriety of her cousin's choice.

Meanwhile there has been one of those social convulsions in the Killeen circle which resembles an eruption from a volcano in their devastating power.

As Lord Killeen sets off from his club on that visit to Mrs. St. John to which the fair and friendly little lady who deals so remuneratively in works of fiction has summoned him, he thinks rather pleasantly of the sensation his beautiful wife will create presently when she drives up to fetch him.

He then goes on to think—equally pleasantly—of the sensation she will cause in society when he has established her in a house that has good entertaining possibilities about it. She must moderate the expression of her views, of course; in fact, from this time she must leave all public proclamation of opinion to him, and merely gracefully and quietly indicate the lines on which influential men ought to run. But she must do her diplomacy very retiringly henceforth, for she is a woman of rank now, and he has no fancy for seeing the mother of the probable future Lord Killeen mentioned as a seditious leader.

‘Her tact is so perfect that she will just as readily adapt herself to the monotonous ways of fashionable life as she did to the larger and bolder field in which she has been recently labouring,’ he tells himself, in a spirit of self-gratulation. Then he goes on to wonder what in the name of anything reasonable can make Mrs. St. John demand his presence so peremptorily, and he half fears that the accomplished and sympathetic lady whom he is about to visit may resent his marriage as an offence against herself.

For he has flattered and flirted with her also, after the manner of his universally accommodating countrymen, and if Mr. St. John had been thoughtless enough to die and

cease to be an obstacle, his widow may think herself aggrieved in that he (Lord Killeen) has now rendered it impossible for him to redeem certain promises spoken in idleness which he has made to her in days of yore.

‘But she’s a good-natured woman, and not a violent one; I shall soon smooth her over, and make it straight between her and the winner,’ he tells himself, with a smile. His conscience reproaches him very slightly for the elastic way in which he has stretched out his web of gallant attentions and tender winning lures around a variety of women, and it would not reproach him one whit if family pride did not tell him that it has been an error of taste on his part having done so while he was engaged to Darragh.

Altogether, his thoughts have strayed far away from present circumstances and his new wife by the time he reaches Mrs. St. John’s door.

She is not in the drawing-room when he goes in, and she delays making her appearance sufficiently long for him to take note of the aspect of the room, and to find in it indications of her current interests and employment.

It is a prettily-arranged room, well curtained and carpeted; though the floor is of indisputably artistic parquet, Mrs. St. John prefers the snugness and sense of comfort which is inspired by a thick, soft carpet. A large well-drawerred and ordered writing-table stands in a convenient light. Beautiful cabinets, filled with even more beautiful china and antique glass, are about the room. Large mirrors, draped with Indian silks of exquisite textures and colours, lighten and brighten the walls, and flowers, fragrant and glorious, are placed in every available niche and corner.

Books abound on shelves and in slides, and a long, low table is littered with a number of newspapers and magazines. A tall waste-paper basket, a sheet of manuscript half-finished,

tell of 'the trade' of the occupant of this room. It is all characteristic, comfortable, and cleverly arranged.

The sound of the opening door arouses him from a reverie into which he has nearly fallen over a photograph of his wife and Mrs. St. John taken together, and he looks up to see Mrs. St. John standing in the doorway.

She is not looking ill, but she gives him the impression of being weak and swayed by deep emotion as she stands, one hand on her hip, the other clasping the half-opened door, undulating from side to side. Uncertainty, nervous excitement, and a sensitive shrinking from some task that has been forced upon her, are all clearly expressed in her bearing and her face.

'What the deuce does it all mean?' Lord Killeen asks himself. Then she comes forward with a gait and air in which hesitation and determination are strangely blended, and speaks :

'I am more to be pitied than any woman in London at this moment, for I have to tell *you* cruel things, and to give you pain will be agony to me,' she falters ; then adds brokenly, 'mine is a thankless office.'

CHAPTER XXXII.

'NOBLY PLANNED.'

'DON'T fill it, then,' Lord Killeen cries impulsively, striving to ward off a blow which he intuitively feels is designed to hurt his wife. But, with a melodramatically melancholy wave of her hand, Mrs. St. John persists in what she terms her painful office.

'Is it too late? First, before I say words that can never be recalled or forgotten, *is* it too late?' she asks, with a theatrical manner that is either assumed because she thinks it effective, or that has been natural to her at some earlier period of her career.

'Is this assumed? Are you rehearsing a scene for private theatricals, or have you anything to say to me in reality, Mrs. St. John?' he says sternly.

She turns her head away and covers her eyes with her hand. A suppressed storm of sobs gently flutters her bosom, but he is quick to see that a smile which she has forgotten to suppress is creeping round the corners of her mouth.

'She is going to stab! And I thought her such an amiable, soft, buttermilk sort of creature,' he tells himself as she draws a deep sigh, and composing her face to an expression of gravity which hardly sits naturally on its plump surface, says in a low, distinct monotone:

'It has been reported, and the report has been repeated to me, that you are about to marry Mrs. O'Leary; in fact, one ridiculous person, always ready to propagate gossip, came and told me that you *were* already married. Of course, I nipped this fatal rumour in the bud——'

'This "fatal rumour," as you politely call it, is perfectly true. I am married,' he says, with that air of being fossilized which subdues even strong men when they are sensitive and open to impressions.

'But not to Mrs. O'Leary? Tell me, it is not to Mrs. O'Leary?' she says, clasping her hands and coming closer to him in her fervour.

'Mrs. O'Leary is now "Lady Killeen," and I am not inclined to hear her commented upon in any way by anyone.'

‘It is easy enough to take that stand, but have you the strength to keep it, my poor friend?’ she asks, with a pitying, pathetic quiver in her voice that is inexpressibly irritating to Lord Killeen.

‘I have not only the strength to keep it, I have the common manliness to declare it and maintain it at once; but to you, Mrs. St. John, this cannot be necessary—you and Lady Killeen are friends.’

‘*Were* friends; but I have been cruelly disappointed, Mrs. St. John says, showing signs of hysteria.

‘With your disappointment I have nothing to do; with *my wife’s* happiness everything. She is waiting for me now. How shall I excuse myself? Shall I say that I came to see *a friend* of hers, or shall I tell her the sad truth, that you doubt and choose to disavow her?’

‘Not for worlds!’ Mrs. St. John says in real dismay, ‘for you would listen to what she would say against me—and in her anger she would say dreadful things—whereas you will not listen to what, merely in self-defence, I might say about her.’

‘In self-defence! Nonsense! I have always heard my wife speak of you in friendly terms; it is from *you* that the declaration of war has come.’

Mrs. St. John bites her lips and turns rather pale.

‘You have tied my tongue,’ she says bitterly; ‘you have given me to understand that you will not listen, without considering yourself insulted, to anything that the voice of friendship may say about your wife. Ah! you little know what provocation I have had! you little know how I have been stung and deceived in return for my tender trust and confidence; you little know how I have been traduced and maligned——’

‘Nor do I wish to learn,’ he interrupts quietly. ‘Lady Killeen is innocent, I am sure, of having done either one or the other.’

‘I admitted her to my house; I introduced her to my friends when she was a comparatively friendless woman; I was the cause of her knowing *you* in the first place; and how have I been requited?’

Her rage is rapidly gaining the mastery over her, and causing her to regret that she is under orders to abstain from saying anything derogatory of his wife.

‘You have not been requited unworthily by Lady Killeen,’ he says, making staunch declarations of his perfect and unshaken faith in the social integrity and upright dealing of the woman who is his wife.

‘She is an adept in deceit, indeed, if she has made you believe that she has dealt fairly by me,’ Mrs. St. John says, tremulous with indignation. ‘It was *I* who verified the statement of O’Leary’s death, which she doubted when it reached her; it was *I* who gave her confirmation strong of the fact that she might dare to use her freedom, believing (because she told me so) that she was going to make a very different use of it. Had I known that *you* were to be her victim, I——’

‘You have said enough. I quite agree with you that it is impossible that further friendly relations can exist between my wife and you. Good morning, madame.’

‘She is a siren, and if you listen to her voice you will be deaf to the tones of law and justice soon,’ she says passionately, and with an air of intense conviction that she well knows how to express; but Lord Killeen is, if not beyond hearing the words, at any rate beyond the necessity of replying to them.

He goes home with a heart full of loyalty to his wife, and

a fixed resolve to forget altogether everything that Mrs. St. John has said and implied against her.

‘She’s such a bright, high-spirited, open-natured creature,’ he says to himself; ‘it’s out of the bounds of possibility that she could be treacherous in her dealings with either man or woman—that’s why women mistake her and dislike her. Such women, at least, as this one I’ve just left. Darragh wouldn’t. Darragh would respond to the genuine ring of the metal, and there’s genuine ring about my lady, I’m sure.’

He is ready to be profuse in his apologies for having missed his appointment with her at his club, and though he thinks it singular that she should not have attended to his request and followed him to Mrs. St. John’s, still, as matters have gone, he is rather glad than otherwise that she has not done so.

‘Clever as she is, she is such a dear, unsuspecting, good-natured creature that I needn’t fear her pressing any home inquiries that may lead to unpleasant disclosures upon me,’ he thinks, as he turns into the Grosvenor. But in spite of his belief in his own words, he experiences a startling revulsion of feeling when he catches the first glimpse of my lady’s face, and hears her first words:

‘So! you have been to that woman, and without me! You have been listening to her sneaking insinuations and malevolent renderings of the reason why we parted, have you?’ she begins, in a voice of such concentrated fury that Lord Killeen almost feels for a moment as if he were guilty of that with which she is charging him.

‘I went to Mrs. St. John’s because she wrote to ask me to see her, and because I imagined that you and she were friends,’ he says injudiciously, for by his last words he admits the fact of knowing now that they are not.

‘Friends !’ she repeats, in a voice of unutterable scorn ; and in her wrath she is very picturesque and handsome. ‘Whatever I may be, whatever that woman may try to make me out to be, I am not so mean and false a thing as she is ; I would not send for *her* bridegroom—if she had trapped a man into marrying her—in order to poison his mind against her.’

‘She has failed—I mean, she can never succeed in poisoning my mind against you, darling,’ he says pacifically, for their room is on a fully occupied corridor, and he has no idea of the thickness of the walls. At all times Lady Killeen’s voice is a loud, clear, penetrating, bell-like organ, but when raised in wrath she could be heard from one side of Stonehenge to the other.

‘She has failed, you say ! Then she has tried—the cat !’

‘This is quite unworthy of you,’ he says, in a tone of tender remonstrance. ‘Why irritate yourself and distress me about anything Mrs. St. John may possibly say ?’

‘Because what she has said will rankle in your mind ; because if I am stabbed in the back I will turn upon my assailant while I have life ; because in sending for you she has challenged me to a duel, and—I mean to accept her challenge ; one of us must fall.’

‘It shall not be you, my wife !’ he says gallantly.

‘Pooh ! nonsense ! You don’t know what you are talking about if you think you can meet and refute that woman’s insidious attacks. Did she tell you why we parted ?’

‘I’m sure I forget,’ he says, with unaffected indifference, for he regards all this as a tempest in a tea-cup.

‘Forget ! you are a worthy ally truly if you “forget” an insult that is offered to me,’ she says sarcastically, for her ungovernable temper—that temper which has been the bane

and curse of her life—is in arms now, and she does not care for consequences.

‘Perhaps we had better close the subject with this assurance from me, that Mrs. St. John has not said anything against you, and that if she had done so, it would not have made the slightest impression.’

‘Are you so really pachydermatous? are you so callous to my honour and happiness?’ she cries, misunderstanding him in her rage, and construing his indifference to evil report of her into indifference to herself.

‘You are misinterpreting what I say wilfully.’

‘Oh! you are the slave of that woman’s ingratiating, fawning manner. She always said she could, would, and did guide you,’ Lady Killeen cries, almost beside herself with passion now. ‘Why did I not leave you to become her tool? why did I link my lot with a coward who lacks the courage to defend his wife against a false attack, or to accuse her if he believes the attack to be justified?’

‘Why did I link myself with such an utterly unreasonable woman?’ he says, coolly taking up a newspaper. Her repulsion of his friendly advances and explanations, the distorted view which she will persist in taking of his conduct in the affair, has worn out his patience at last.

He is entirely unprepared for what follows, or his patience would stand a little further strain upon it.

As he picks up the paper he leans back in his chair, and the large sheet of the *Times*, lifted up to his reading level, intercepts the view of which he is rapidly tiring—namely, that of his infuriated wife.

Suddenly the paper is snatched from his hands, and there before him stands Lady Killeen, her whole form quivering with passion, her face white and distorted with such rage and suffering as will stamp themselves indelibly upon his

mind and vision, and in her hand a knife which she has caught up from the luncheon-table.

‘You shall not scorn me so!’ she shrieks. ‘You shall suffer for it, or I will not live to see it,’ and she lifts the knife high into the air, hesitating for a moment as to whether she shall plunge it into his heart or her own.

At this moment the door is thrown open by one of the servants of the hotel, and as Darragh walks into the room, Lady Killeen turns her head with a gurgling cry, in which there is pitiful despair; and as she falls backwards on the floor the knife is wrested from an epileptic woman’s hand.

‘Her ladyship is taken unaccountably ill,’ Lord Killeen says hurriedly, to the servant; ‘fetch a doctor—the best—at once: Darragh, bless you for coming—even to this.’

Poor fellow! the veil has been rudely rent from before his eyes already.

It seems to Darragh that it is her vocation to witness ghastly scenes, and to minister to the suffering now. She takes her place in the chamber of insensibility, and carries out the doctor’s instructions with regard to the unconscious sufferer as naturally as if she and Lady Killeen were fond friends and she (Darragh) had trained for a hospital nurse.

In mercy (as Lord Killeen feels it to be) the Irish girl refrains from asking a single question or hazarding a single suggestion. The illness with which her cousin’s unfortunate wife has been so suddenly smitten claims all her sympathy, care, and attention, and it receives that which it claims. There is a sense of comfort and security to Lord Killeen in the way in which his cousin takes off her bonnet, and proceeds to make herself useful, without fuss or conjecture.

‘Do you think this will last long? do you think she will get over it?’ he whispers to Darragh, as together they stand

by the side of the bed on which the form of Lady Killeen is being wracked and tortured by one of those convulsions which the doctor has assured them 'are more painful to the witnesses than to the patient.'

'I don't know, Killeen, it's a new illness to me; over-excitement brings it on, Dr. Gordon says, and your—my poor cousin, has been terrible over-excited of late, you know.'

'Terribly,' he says tersely, but he thanks her with a look for the way in which she has accorded kinship to Lady Killeen.

'I shall stay and watch her; she will want some one with her when she comes out of this state of coma; it is better that some one should be a relation and friend, isn't it?'

'My dear Darragh!' he says, with emotion, and he can say no more.

'So you must send a line to Mrs. Thorne for me, asking for some things to be sent to me, and saying why I'm staying. How beautiful she is, Killeen!' she continues, bending down over the pillow on which the white face reposes peacefully again. 'How we will both guard her against doing anything to bring on another attack, won't we?'

He bows his head in assent. Darragh's words, unintentionally as they are uttered, fill him with remorse. If he had not obeyed Mrs. St. John's mandate to call on her—if he had only given his wife some ampler assurance than he had succeeded in giving her that she was unshaken on the pedestal on which he has placed her, this dread thing, this fit that is like a fierce tiger, would not have assailed her. As it is, he is too thoroughly frightened and shaken to feel confident of being able to protect her properly in the future. So there is little besides grateful humility in the tone in which he says—

'You will be her best friend, Darragh, and she will trust

you and let you help her :’ from which remark, independently of the evidence of the uplifted knife, Darragh infers that it has not been all smooth sailing since the lately married pair embarked on life’s ocean together.

But Darragh has the discretion which is born of delicate feeling and kindheartedness, and so she neither asks nor looks a question. Her weary, anxious watch lasts without intermission for many hours. It is dark night when Lady Killeen recovers consciousness. A night-light dimly illuminates the room. With a few quiet words Darragh draws near to the side of the bed, accounting for her own presence here in an easy, natural way that almost persuades Lady Killeen ‘to believe that there has been no collusion’ for a moment or two.

But the warped nature has been tricked and warred upon indirectly so often that it cannot all at once take up its disused habit of faith and trust. Even in the clear light of such a face as Darragh’s Lady Killeen will see darkly for a time.

‘I came to call just as you fainted, and being your cousin, you know, I thought you would rather have me for your nurse than any one else,’ Miss Thynne says, soothingly laying her hand on the broad, beautiful brow that is bent upon her so sternly.

‘It was well done to steal upon me unawares and take me at my worst ; it was arranged between you and your *cousin* that you should come in and see his wife behaving like a mad woman when he had maddened her ! It was nobly planned——’

Words fail her, and she falls back upon the pillow, weeping terribly, for her physical strength is spent, and hate and suspicion are dying out.

‘Your hands in mine, your head on my shoulder,’ Darragh says.

'I have no desire to embrace a serpent—it may crush me to death in its affected affection,' Lady Killeen says, struggling as well as her weakness will permit to push Darragh away from her.

'You're dreaming still ; it is I—Darragh,' Miss Thynne says soothingly. She will not even allow herself to be astonished, far less annoyed, at the extraordinary tone which this woman, whom she has been tending with the tenderness of a sister and the skill of a physician for several hours, is adopting towards her.

'I know it is you, Darragh,' Lady Killeen answers. There is something sneering as well as fierce in her tone, and Darragh involuntarily shrinks away from it.

'Don't pretend to shrink from me as if I were a mad woman,' Lady Killeen cries. '*I know* that is what you will tell people now, as you timed your entrance so cleverly—just as I was getting ill ; it was planned between you and your cousin—your old lover—to give him a handle against me. Confess that it was.'

She grips Darragh's wrist as she speaks, but neither the pain she inflicts with her nervous, clenched fingers nor the insult which her words convey have the power to discompose Darragh.

'I should be mad myself to think you so,' she says cheerfully ; 'but I know you have been very ill, and I want you to keep quiet and get strong, and then have Arthur in and relieve his anxiety about you. Poor Arthur was so frightened about you when you fainted.'

'I know what I was doing before I—"fainted," as you call it,' Lady Killeen says, with a smile and a cunning glare in her eyes that would almost warrant the suspicion that madness and herself were allied.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

LADY KILLEEN REMEMBERS—AND FORGETS.

‘WELL, we won’t speak of it now,’ Darragh replies, with invincible good-humour. ‘I am your nurse—please to remember that, and as I want to get my patient up and out as soon as possible, I must get her to eat something.’

‘Eat! I shall never eat anything again,’ Lady Killeen says wearily, falling back upon the pillow. ‘How cruel people are! How cruel Nature is!’ she goes on, and tears welling into her eyes as she speaks seem to attest to the truth of her accusation. ‘These awful illnesses of mine!’ she adds piteously. ‘No one knows what I suffer before they come on, and when I’m recovering. I am sore and bruised in body and broken in mind, and every one is looking out for flaws in my conduct to punish me for being punished by Nature already.’

‘Let Arthur come to you now!’ Darragh pleads, taking advantage of the lapse into the softer mood. But Lady Killeen turns stubborn instantly.

‘By “Arthur” you mean Lord Killeen, I suppose. He has never been Arthur to me, you must remember.’

‘I mean your husband, of course,’ Darragh says. The girl’s patience is being sorely tried by this fractiousness, but she maintains the appearance of it still, for who will stand by this woman with the twist in her mind if she (Darragh) refuses to do so?

There is silence for a few minutes. Then Lady Killeen puts a hand out, and gropes for something on the little table by the side of the bed.

‘My powder-box and puff, where are they?’ she asks

peevishly ; 'it is my strict order that they are put here every night. Where are they ? Where is Millar, my maid ?'

'Millar went to bed, and is probably asleep now ; let me help you——'

'No, no—you won't know where to find the lace for my head, and if you find it you won't know how to pin it on,' Lady Killeen says eagerly, half-rising in the excitement of these toilet questions from her recumbent position among the downy pillows ; 'besides, can *you* put on powder properly ? I don't believe it !'

'You can tell me and I'll try,' Darragh says, laughing. She does not feel called upon to lecture this poor, weak, suffering woman for frivolity, for Darragh has a heart to feel for those things below the surface which her clear eyes discern.

This acquiescence in her scheme of making herself up for the coming interview with her husband has a most softening influence on Lady Killeen. She lies back contentedly, while Darragh bathes the beautiful pain-lined face, and brushes out the silky lengths of soft golden-brown hair. But when it comes to improving her complexion, and adjusting the lace which is to soften it, Lady Killeen grows restive.

'One grain too much, and it would make me look like a painted Jezebel,' she says, taking the powder-box—an egg-shell in silver—from Darragh's hands. Then she feebly applies it with fingers that tremble, and so fail to do their work perfectly according to her artistic eyes and sense of the fit application of powder.

'Bah !' she exclaims in disgust, as she views the effect of her work in a hand-glass ; 'it's this glaring morning light that ruins me. No woman ought to show herself till twelve o'clock in the day, unless she is a milkmaid.'

Then she proceeds to catechise Darragh strictly and eagerly as to how she 'really does look,' and whether a touch of colour, 'a bow of pink or crimson, wouldn't be an improvement fastening the lace under her chin;' and as Darragh fails to find the required ribbon in a drawer full of gorgeous litter, Lady Killeen begins to sigh for 'Millar' again, and to feel herself bereft of congenial society.

She has apparently quite recovered her normal good-temper and light-heartedness, and as her strength returns, she seems to have cast aside all embarrassing memories of that fit of rage or madness which seemed likely to have such a tragical termination, when Darragh entered the room and saw the knife being balanced impartially between Lady Killeen and her husband. But with her good temper and light-heartedness has come back her insatiable craving for excitement and change.

'How tired you must be after sitting up all night. I wish you'd go and rest now, and send Millar to me,' she says to Darragh, and the latter has no excuse for not obeying her.

'Give me a kiss,' Lady Killeen exclaims impulsively, as Darragh is going away; then with one arm round the girl's neck she goes on:

'When I get put out as—as I was put out yesterday by something you know nothing about, I lose my head for a time, and then I believe I say horrible things to people, no matter whether I'm fond of them or not. If I've said anything cruel to you, forgive me, I have not meant it *for you*.'

Darragh accords a free and perfect forgiveness.

'That's right!' the woman who is ailing in body and mind says quickly, bending forward to catch a glimpse of her own picturesque charms in the cheval glass at the end of the room. 'That's right! and now go and send Millar to me.'

‘You’ll see Arthur first?’

‘No, I won’t; when Millar has held up my new dresses for me to look at I shall be in a better mood for Killeen; but you’ll stay and be nice and kind to him till I’m ready, won’t you? I’m not laying a trap for you, I’m not indeed,’ she continues, starting up again.

‘Laying a trap!’ Darragh repeats, in bewilderment.

‘Why, yes; don’t you see? Some women would be mean enough to ask you to stay, and then wicked enough to make out that you had stayed for the sake of the man to whom you had once been engaged; don’t you understand?’

‘I don’t think I do, quite,’ Darragh says. Then she frees herself from Lady Killeen’s caressing arm, and goes in search of Millar.

‘It’s like missus to want to drag me up when I’m having the first refreshing sleep I’ve had for hours,’ that functionary grumbles when Darragh arouses her. ‘As for you, Miss Thynne, I pity you for having been with her through all her tantrums, for I know what she is when she’s coming out of them fits; she hasn’t a good word to say to anyone.’

‘She has said several good words of you, at any rate,’ Darragh says quietly, ‘and as she wants you very much, I hope you’ll get up and go to her.’

‘I pity my lord,’ Millar snaps.

‘Oh! I hope she will soon be better and stronger,’ Darragh says heartily, purposely misunderstanding the cause which had elicited this pity. ‘Call him when you’ve dressed, Millar, it will be such a relief to him, poor fellow, to know his wife is better.’

‘Are you going, miss?’

‘Yes; but I shall come back,’ Darragh says. Then she goes away, and peering out of a window Millar sees a waiter putting Miss Thynne into a cab. ‘I’m so used to my lady,

'tis hard for *me* to judge whether any other woman is more angel or devil,' she says meditatively.

When Lord Killeen, summoned by Millar, does visit his wife this morning, he finds that lady in a bright, gay humour that perplexes him. She is lying on a sofa in a tea-gown of young sycamore-leafed satin, trimmed deeply with Valenciennes lace. Her complexion is pale, full of pearly reflections, which Darragh's untutored hand had failed to put there, and on a table by her side are all the daily papers.

The recollection of how they parted on the previous day flashes into his mind as he sees her, but in a moment she dispels the unpleasant memory.

'I have been so impatient for you to come to me ever since Darragh left,' she says, stretching out a jewelled hand, and smiling very sweetly. 'While Darragh was here—she is so kind, so perfect—I didn't want you.'

The soft clasp of her hand and the beaming affection in her well-trained eyes as she says this do away with the unflattering suggestion her words might otherwise convey.

At least, they do away with it in Lord Killeen's estimation, but not in Millar's.

According to her view of the case, Millar has borne the brunt of the situation, and been the one to make it practically pleasant to Lady Killeen this morning. What Miss Thynne may have done in the way of nursing in the night is nothing to Millar. She (Millar) has been the peg on which new dresses, fresh from White's and Worth's, have been hung this morning, and she it is to whom this delicate pearly hue of youth and purity on Lady Killeen's cheeks is due. The soul of the sewing-woman is in arms as she reflects on these things, and it is with a touch of unusual asperity in her tone that she says—

'I'm sure, my lady, if I'd known that you'd have preferred

Miss Thynne to get you up, which you would naturally, she being so "nice and kind," I should have stayed in bed gladly, and got some of the rest which your illness broke up last night.'

'You can go out of the room now, at once,' Lady Killeen says chillingly; and Millar drops a dress, in which broché velvet, cream-coloured silk, and Mechlin lace meet in well-harmonized confusion, on the floor, as she abruptly retreats from the room.

'I hear I was *awful* last night when the attack came on?' Lady Killeen says pathetically. She has made up her mind to forget all that she remembers having heard about or said of Mrs. St. John.

'No, no, not awful!' Lord Killeen says mendaciously. He knows now that he has made a bad bargain, but there is no need to give his knowledge to the world. Then he goes on, 'You are much better now, you know, dear; you'll have to keep quiet and give up political excitement.'

She laughs softly. It would almost please her better if he said—

'You are a tigress: you will always be ready to tear those who come athwart you. See! I cut your claws.'

But he does not say this. On the contrary, he gives vent to ingratiating remarks, and suffers her to see that she will not be called to account for her rabid display of yesterday. This gives her the victor's feeling, and there are some women who cannot gain a victory without growing dangerous.

'The doctor says my whole nervous system has been overstrained, and Darragh backs him up and says I have need of the most perfect rest and quiet. I suppose they are right,' she says, with an air of sudden prostration. Then with a well-conceived portrayal of curiosity she adds:

‘What *was* it made me ill yesterday?’

‘Nothing that I know of,’ he says carelessly, for he is resolved to keep Mrs. St. John out of the controversy if possible. But Lady Killeen is more than a match for him.

‘Surely I remember. Yes; I *do*,’ she says, putting her hand up to her forehead. ‘I was hurt—my feelings were tried by hearing that one whom I believed in as a friend had been cruelly aspersing me to *you*.’

‘She did nothing of the kind, because I wouldn’t let her,’ Lord Killeen says vehemently, for he does not desire a second edition of yesterday. Then his *wife*, who is perfectly mistress of herself now, and aware that in a masterly inactivity she will find the most perfect safety, beams upon him rewardingly, and asks him to promise her that he will never go near that ‘restless, ambitious Mrs. St. John again.’

‘Or, at least, not until something approaching to success in the literary career of which she is so proud has taken the venom out of her,’ she adds; and for the sake of sweet peace he promises.

‘And in return for this I’ll be very friendly with your cousin Darragh. I’ll take her up,’ Lady Killeen says gorgeously. And as she says this Killeen realises ‘how very funny all this would be if her ladyship were some other fellow’s wife, and Darragh some other man’s cousin.’

Yet in spite of this conviction he passes a very pleasant hour by the side of his wife’s sofa. For she is on her mettle to amuse him, and not only to amuse him passably well in the present, but to make him forget whatever has been unpleasant in the immediate past. And being on her mettle with her war-paint on, she succeeds admirably well.

Moreover, whenever she sees that he grows weary of these topics, she reverts to Darragh, and praises her, and Lord

Killeen, though he is not in love with Darragh now, he *has* been in love with her, and is proud of her as one of the finest branches of the family tree. On her praises he is right glad to linger. There is safety in the topic, he thinks, and already Lord Killeen is beginning to think it well to look out for safe topics when discoursing with his wife.

But presently Millar, still aggrieved, and consequently very querulous, comes in after knocking at the door in a way that is at once a warning and a shock.

‘Beg pardon, my lady!’ she says, with ghastly distinctness, ‘but you’re quite out of that “number two” yellow powder, and every other kind blotches your skin. Shall I order some more of “number two” at once?’

‘No, thank you,’ Lady Killeen says, with still more ghastly suavity; ‘my new maid shall order in whatever I may want when you are gone, and you will please to take a month’s wages and go before twelve o’clock to-morrow.’

For a moment or two the woman is staggered at *this* being the result of her impertinence. She had merely designed to get the whip-hand of her mistress; and lo! in some unaccountable way her mistress has turned the tables upon her. She resolves to kick while she can, though, and so she says:

‘If expense is an object to you, my lady, if my being here costs more than you find it convenient to pay—and I know that’s the case with you very often—I can go at once or pay for my own room!’

Lord Killeen rises and rings the bell furiously, but before it can be answered Lady Killeen says soothingly:

‘Hush! Never mind her insolent tongue; all servants are insolent when they have nothing more to get from one—not even a character—and Millar knows that I shall not out of mercy give her as false a one as I got with her. You

may go,' she adds, turning with a royal gesture of disdainful indifference from the eager-faced, angry-mannered woman who has passed those limits of rage within which self-control is possible.

'You may go—I will tell the clerk in the hall to pay your wages; but let me caution you to behave properly if you choose to remain here another night.'

'That's what you find it so difficult to do yourself, my lady,' the woman says, with a spiteful sniff, and a lively recollection of having many valuables in her possession which appear to have passed away from their owner's—her mistress's—memory.

CHAPTER XXXIV

SMOOTHING THE WAY.

By the time Darragh gets back to the Thornes' house at Prince's-gate, which is her temporary home, she is strained to the utmost tension of her nerves, physical strength, and moral endurance. At the same time, her mind is clear enough to give full force and weight to this indisputable, but often forgotten, fact—namely, that other people merely see the outside of things.

'You poor darling!' Mrs. Thorne says, getting up from a poetically-arranged meal which she has been taking in her boudoir at twelve-thirty. Her mood is balmy, for not only is her morning-gown as perfect a thing in Madras muslin and silk Maltese lace of the same colour as you can see this side of the Channel, but she is in a splendid swim for the autumn, Lord Portbank having asked her with the best set for September.

‘You poor darling ! I’ve done nothing but think of you for the last half-hour, the guest—worse than that, the *nurse*—of that *very* odd woman, and all the while Portbank awaiting your high and mighty pleasure.’

‘I am sure Lord Portbank never said that to you—nor to anyone else,’ Darragh says, with a downright simplicity that nearly knocks Mrs. Thorne out of her chair.

‘Perhaps he has never said it, but I am sufficiently in his confidence to know that he means it,’ Mrs. Thorne says loftily. ‘I saw him in the Row yesterday, and told him where you had gone. You should have seen his face !’

‘I never wish to see Lord Portbank’s face,’ Darragh says impatiently ; then she remembers that she is annoyed by what is being said about the man, not with him. ‘I mean,’ she adds deprecatingly, ‘that I don’t want to have his good, kind face held out to me either as a beacon or a warning.’

‘He was shocked when he found that you had gone to Lady Killeen.’

‘Was he indeed ?’

‘Yes ! Do care a little, Darragh ; he cares so much for you !’

‘How pretty your dress is !’ Darragh says, giving an adroit turn to the conversation which cannot fail to please Mrs. Thorne.

‘I’m glad you like it,’ good-natured Mrs. Thorne says, rising to the bait at once ; ‘I felt sure it would be your taste as well as my own, and so I’ve ordered its fellow for you, Darragh.’

Darragh shakes her head.

‘I can’t afford Maltese lace tea-gowns.’

‘My dear child, what utter nonsense ! you haven’t said anything to me about it yourself, but I happen to know

from other people that your cousin left you ten thousand pounds.'

'And already I've planned how to spend it,' Darragh laughs.

'Of course you have,' Mrs. Thorne says encouragingly; 'you've planned to spend the interest on yourself reasonably and comfortably, and among the many reasonable and comfortable necessities of life, a becoming tea-gown takes a high place: don't protest! you'll have it home to-day, and when you see the quality and quantity of lace, you'll admit that it's cheap at ten guineas.'

'I haven't ten guineas to spare.'

'Little miser, you! with ten thousand pounds for pocket-money, and the power of marrying Portbank any day you please!'

'I have made away with the ten thousand pounds,' Darragh says hesitatingly. 'Don't ask me how, for I don't mean to tell you; but I'm just as poor a girl as I was before dear Killeen died.'

'Darragh, you're not a—a——' Mrs. Thorne's lips refuse to utter the word 'gambler,' but her horrified face speaks thrillingly of her fears.

'I've not done anything with the money that my father and mother wouldn't have wished me to do,' Darragh says proudly. 'I think I could have redeemed Darragh with it. Poor Mr. Annesley is so sick of his bargain, that ten thousand pounds would have made my mother's old home mine again; but I have done what *she* would have thought the better thing, though she loved the place like a living creature.'

'Tell me,' Mrs. Thorne says briefly. She is not untouched by the girl's unselfishness, but she does long to know where that ten thousand pounds has gone.

‘No ; I can’t tell you. My secret concerns some one else, and that some one would be wretched if the truth leaked out.’

‘Does this “some one” happen to benefit by the transfer of the ten thousand?’ Mrs. Thorne asks.

‘Yes ; I hope so from my heart and soul ; otherwise I have given in vain,’ Darragh says heartily ; and Mrs. Thorne shrugs her shoulders as she remarks :

‘In that case you needn’t fear that the truth leaking out will very materially affect “his” or “her” happiness. Everyone is selfish in this world, Darragh—everyone but you. It’s no use my asking, for you won’t tell me ! but I feel morally certain that you have given this money to that dreadful woman who has just made herself Lady Killeen.’

‘If it’s any satisfaction to you to hear it, and if the hearing it will stop further inquiries on your part, I will tell you the truth as far as Lady Killeen is concerned,’ Darragh says ; and Mrs. Thorne says eagerly :

‘Oh ! *do* tell me !’

‘Lady Killeen will not benefit directly or indirectly by the money.’

‘Then what on earth have you done with it?’

‘Ah ! you promised not to question me further if I told you the truth as far as Lady Killeen was concerned,’ Darragh says wearily. ‘But, understand, that tea-gown must be countermanded, for I have not ten thousand *shillings* even of my own, and I am not going to marry Lord Portbank.’

Two hours after this Darragh is at the Mackivers’ by appointment.

The appointment has been of her own seeking and making, and in this fact the old people are disposed to find much satisfaction. They are quite aware that she has been

(quite as much as the loss of Dolly's fortune) the cause of their son's defalcation in the matter of his engagement to Miss Annesley. Still, they are disposed to look upon her with very lenient eyes, for she is passing fair, they believe that she reciprocates their son's passion, and—she has ten thousand pounds to her fortune !

They are not sordid, nor are they forgetful of, or indifferent to, Dolly ; but Dolly is divided from them now by what they term 'force of circumstances,' and there is nothing in nature or reason to interpose between Ronald and 'this brave, rich young girl who is coming to offer to make him happy by the gift of herself and her money,' they suppose.

The old lady, roused by the abnormal conditions of the interview, is almost moved to 'bless the bairn who may be her daughter' as Darragh comes in ; but something in the extreme possession of herself which characterizes that young lady restrains her, and she merely gives an extra tug at the little Shetland shawl which covers her shoulders, by way of preparing herself for Miss Thynne's eyes.

'I have come to speak to you about two friends who are very dear to me : your son, Captain Mackiver, and Dolly Annesley,' Darragh says, looking from one to the other of Ronald's parents, and trying to come to a conclusion as to which of the two will respond to her heartfelt speech most heartily.

'God saw fit that they shouldn't be coupled together, so it's as well we leave their names apart,' Mr. Mackiver says solemnly and warily ; but Darragh will have neither solemnity nor wariness on this occasion.

'You mean *man* saw fit, from his narrow point of view, that it would be well for them to part, and now *I* see fit, and can show the way, for them to come together again ,

and be very happy,' Darragh says, with the national tears and smiles struggling for ascendancy in her face.

'It's hardly the mission I'd have thought you'd have come upon,' Mrs. Mackiver says, tugging at the unoffending Shetland shawl; then, warming to her maternal work as she sees her husband is nerving himself to the task of interrupting her, she adds, 'and you can't play the part of Providence, and put riches—or at least a modest competence—in the purse of the dear girl who has been defrauded by her brother——'

'Not defrauded,' Mary Mackiver says quietly, stepping into the room and the conversation. 'Call things by their right names, mother. If Dolly has lost her money it has been through no fraud on her brother's part, but rather through a series of bitter misfortunes that may well win our pity and forgiveness.'

'When people do foolish things in the face of good advice I have no pity for them when the consequences are less pleasant than they expected,' Mrs. Mackiver says harshly.

'But no one advised Mr. Annesley against buying Darragh,' Miss Thynne says deprecatingly.

'For a good reason too; he never asked any one's opinion on the subject,' Mrs. Mackiver replies, 'and now he must pay for his rashness with suffering, and the harder knowledge that his sister must suffer too.'

'But that is what I have come to say Dolly shall not do any longer,' Darragh says, speaking in those quickened tones that denote the waning of patience. 'A blessed chance—a never-to-be-sufficiently-blessed chance—has put it in my power to give back to Dolly all that she has lost through her brother's misfortunes. When I tell you that Dolly has ten thousand pounds of her own again you'll not

stand between her and your son, will you? You'll take her to your hearts as your daughter gladly again, won't you?'

Darragh in her excitement is hardly conscious of the sarcastic doubt her words convey as to the integrity of their affection for Dolly Annesley, but Mary Mackiver is keenly conscious of it.

'Dolly will hardly care to repurchase the place, I'm thinking,' she says drily; and Darragh, who fears that other obstacles than those she has so splendidly surmounted are about to be put in the path of her friend's future happiness, explains, a little excitedly, that they 'don't understand the loyalty and unchangeable fidelity of Dolly's nature.'

'She has never loved one of you less all this sorrowful time. She has kept heart-true to Ronald, and dutifully affectionate to his father and mother, even when you all seemed to cast her off,' she says.

'And it's only sensible and reasonable that she should have done so,' Mrs. Mackiver says steadily. Fortune is going to smile upon Dolly once more, and the old lady is quite willing to follow Fortune's lead; but she is not disposed to admit that she acted with anything but the most exemplary judgment, feeling, and discretion in having sided with the fickle goddess when she frowned.

'You are doing more than even a sister ought to do. Is it that your love for Dolly is so strong that you'll reduce yourself to poverty, and do away with the intention of the one who strove to make your lot in life a happy one?' Mary Mackiver asks searchingly; and Darragh answers with decision:

'I shall be happier in bringing those two together again than money can ever make me.'

'And you'll have the satisfaction of an approving con-

science, and that's the greatest this world can give to any one,' Mrs. Mackiver says approvingly.

'I only trust that your relations will exonerate us from the suspicion of having influenced you. It would be a sore grief and trial to me to be thought to have acted in a mercenary manner, even on behalf of my only son and the young lady who is like a daughter to us,' Mr. Mackiver says, with an air of rectitude that Darragh knows to be real, and that nevertheless irritates her now.

'*Dolly*, perhaps, *is* deserving of any sacrifice that may be made for her,' Mary says, with emphasis that seems to say that in her sisterly heart she does not reckon Ronald's deserts equally high.

'In case of any legal dispute arising about the matter, I had better see that the deed of gift is properly executed before we upset Ronald's mind about it,' Mr. Mackiver says prudently.

'There is no one to dispute my giving what is my own to any one I please,' Darragh tells him; but Mr. Mackiver shakes his head at this rash assumption of power and independence, and says :

'In case of your death, my dear young lady—we can't be too careful, you'll understand—in case of your death, if the money is not settled legally hard and fast on Dolly and her heirs for ever, your next of kin might step in and make things very difficult for the young people you desire to benefit. So, as it's well there should be no delay in matters where money is concerned, I'll see your lawyer on the subject to-day, if you'll give me his address; and when I've seen him I'll write to Ronald and advise him to lose no time about settling the time for the marriage,' Mr. Mackiver says, beginning to bustle about with an air of complacency to which he has been a stranger since the day he

learned that Dolly's fortune was swamped in the lands of Darragh.

'Oh, *don't* put it to him in that way,' Darragh cries, in an agony of sensitiveness, both for Dolly and Ronald. 'Remember, they have been separated, and such bonds, once sundered, can't be re-united at the command of another person. Let him know that Dolly's fortune is restored to her, and that nothing stands in the way of their happy marriage now.'

'And let him know by whom it is restored,' Mary says gravely.

'Ah, no—no ! *That* you must never let them know—not, at least, till I am gone away beyond the possibility of hearing the foolish arguments they'll use to induce me to undo what I have done ; and, as what I have done is irrevocable, besides being the sweetest and best work of my life, let it stand without assaults being made upon it, if you love them—and me !'

The appeal is irresistible. The old people wipe their eyes, and, with more emotion than they have either thought the other would betray about mundane matters, consent to see their children enriched at the expense of the generous young lady who, for herself, seems to value so lightly the fortune which has made her of so much importance to them.

But Mary has a few words to say to this beautiful, young, unworldly guardian angel, whose beneficent wings have been spread so practically over Dolly and Ronald.

'My lassie !' she says tenderly, taking Darragh's hands in her firm clasp, when she has drawn the girl into a room apart from the old people—'my lassie, you are giving more than your gold to my brother and the girl who ought to have been his wife without.'

‘I am giving it with love : do you mean that ?’ Darragh asks, in a low voice.

‘Ay, I do ; you’re giving them love and gold, and with the gift you’re offering up the best hopes you’ve ever had of joy and self-gratification. Their children, if they ever have any, ought to rise up and call *you* blessed ; for what you’re doing ought to make them the noblest pair that were ever brought together by one nobler than themselves.’

‘You mustn’t make me vain and weak.’

‘No ; for you’ll need your strength. Now, tell me, what’s this that it’s in your mind to do ? for I know you’ll not marry, Darragh Thynne—you’ve done with all thoughts of marriage.’

‘I have. I’m going to try and be as useful in the world as if I had a mate. I’m going to do whatever comes to my hand to do : it may be I shall turn nurse. What do you advise ?’

‘Just to do what you say—“whatever comes to your hand to do.” The Lord will put good work into such hands as yours.’

‘And you will make them keep my secret from Dolly and your brother ?’

‘Dolly’s heart will feel the truth at once. As for my brother—well, it’s not those who stand heroes in the fight for whom the highest-souled women lay down their lives.’

‘You would have been as ready as I am to do it,’ Darragh says quickly, ‘did you happen to love the woman as I love Dolly.’

Mary Mackiver shakes her head.

‘No !’ she says sternly ; ‘but I saw her die for him when she brought his son into the world ; and *he* thought I could forget as quickly as he did himself, for when that son was six months old he thought I should be a conscientious nurse, and asked me to marry him.’

“No hero, but a man,” Darragh quotes softly. Then she adds :

‘I see what your work has been—to devote yourself to your father and mother, and to try and make Ronald as strong as you are yourself. I wish my work would come to me, soon ; my play-time is past.’

In accordance with his expressed intention to Darragh, Mr. Mackiver sees her lawyer and satisfies himself that the ten thousand pounds is conveyed to Dolly and her heirs for ever in a way that cannot be tampered with, and, in the fulness of his satisfaction at this being the case, the old man writes off to his son at once.

‘Dolly Annesley’s fortune is restored to and firmly settled upon her,’ he writes. ‘I trust that you will not long delay the fulfilment of the honourable engagement you are under to her—in the event of all obstacles being (as they now are) removed. Assure her of our readiness to welcome her into the family at once, and prove yourself worthy of the honour she will confer upon you by doing so.’

CHAPTER XXXV.

‘AGAIN LOVE ME.’

RONALD MACKIVER gets his father’s letter, just as at the head of his company he is about to march to the scene of an anticipated riot two or three miles from the temporary quarters they are occupying.

Seeing that the letter is from his father, and not being accustomed to receive news of imminent importance from home, he unconcernedly pockets the letter with the remark to himself that its ‘contents will keep,’ and proceeds to open several that have no interest whatever.

In accordance with the everlasting law of contrariness, the riot that has been anticipated does not come off, and Captain Mackiver marches back with his men without one episode arising to break the monotony of the outing.

It is still early in the afternoon when he gets back into the hastily-contrived barracks in which he and his men are assisting life and liberty in Ireland, and the 'natural thing to do' for him under these circumstances is to walk over to Darragh and talk to Dolly Annesley.

He meets her in the grounds about a **couple** of hundred yards from the house.

'I have been to see Ferroll's wife,' she says to him, trying to speak calmly; 'he is found guilty of manslaughter, and the Queen's pardon is to be asked for, because there was no intent to kill Lord Killeen. Robert is interesting **himself** on behalf of the poor unhappy man.'

'Robert being the one the poor unhappy man meant to murder?'

'Ah! Ronald! but think how they're misled; think of their hot hearts and tempers,' Dolly says deprecatingly, and Captain Mackiver smiles rather sadly as he recognises Darragh's influence in the words.

They sit down on a seat on a terrace in front of the house, and Dolly begins to dive into a basket which Kathleen has only a few minutes before delivered up into her safe keeping.

'Such luxuries!' the girl says, laughing; 'you must stay and dine. Here's a giant lobster—he's good for three dishes, a dozen eggs, and a lot of little flat-fish; come in and see me cook, will you?'

'Yes'—Ronald is quite ready—'only wait a minute while I read a letter from home,' he says, taking his father's letter unopened out of his pocket.

'Tell me all about them ; what are they doing, and what does he say ?' Dolly asks, settling herself back on the seat in preparation for the peaceful enjoyment of news 'from home,' as she still fondly calls the Mackivers' house.

In perfect ignorance of what is to come, Captain Mackiver begins reading aloud :—

'MY DEAR RONALD,—

'Dolly Annesley's fortune is restored to and firmly settled upon her'—his impulse is to pause, but an eager cry of curiosity and joy from Dolly urges him to go on—to his own confusion : 'I trust that you will not long delay the fulfilment of the honourable engagement you are under to her.'

Stammering out these words, scarlet from embarrassment and annoyance, he comes to a halt now that it is too late. He looks at her imploringly, trusting that she will break the spell of mortification which is holding him in thrall. And she does not disappoint him ! She is always to be relied upon.

Surprised and startled, perplexed and pained, as she is by Mr. Mackiver's allusion to her engagement to Ronald, she is still above all things anxious to restore Ronald to a state of self-possession and unrestraint. Accordingly she rises unhurriedly, as if all her thoughts were on her household duties, and saying quietly—

'When you have found out where this wonderful fortune has come from, and convinced yourself that dear Mr. Mackiver is not labouring under some fond delusion, you'll come in and tell me more about it, won't you, Ronald ? I must go in, for this lobster has to be curried, and made into patties and a *mayonnaise*, and these subtle works of cookery-art take time. Come in presently, won't you ?'

She is walking away, looking out with apparent unconcern at the view, which is grand and wide from this terrace walk, and Captain Mackiver mutters a few words that may be about anything. She does not hear them ; for all her outward calm, her head is in a whirl !

He reads the remainder of his father's letter, and the truth is revealed to him ! It is Darragh who has done this ! Darragh who has given him the opportunity of redeeming his honour and marrying Dolly Annesley !

He sits there in a pitiable state of discomfiture for an hour or more. It seems to have been easy enough for his father to write the words of prudent counsel ; but if Ronald Mackiver knows himself, he will never be able to act upon them.

How can he go to Dolly with a tale of love and constancy, and ask for her hand now that it holds ten thousand pounds, when he lapsed from her, and relinquished that hand when poverty assailed her ? Besides, she knows how his heart has veered to Darragh ; and Dolly will never accept an allegiance that has once swerved.

So he is telling himself, arguing himself round to consider the case in spite of everything, when Robert Annesley comes to look for him.

'Dolly told me to come and fetch you in to dinner. She has done something rather brilliant in the way of cooking, I gather from her triumphant manner,' Mr. Annesley says, as he loiters up.

'Has Dolly said anything to you about my father's letter ?' Captain Mackiver asks hurriedly.

'No—nothing wrong, I hope, Mackiver ? No one ill ?'

'No ; read it ;' and Ronald hands the letter to Dolly's brother.

It is almost as embarrassing for Mr. Annesley to read it

before the one to whom the sage advice is addressed, as it was for that one to read it before Dolly.

Mr. Annesley's face flushes and his eyes kindle, as he reads the first few words, but he goes on without making a remark until the end. Then he says simply :

‘I'm glad, for my sister's sake.’

‘Yes,’ Captain Mackiver says awkwardly.

‘But who can have done it? That remains to be found out, and until it is found I shall not let Dolly touch the money,’ Mr. Annesley says decidedly. ‘We certainly haven't a relation in the world who would do it for my sister, and I scarcely thought we had such a friend.’

‘Can't you guess?’ Ronald says, turning his face away as he speaks.

‘No—you don't mean to say that *your* people have done it, Mackiver?’

Ronald shakes his head.

‘There's only one person in the world of whom I can think who has the will and power ; and that one is Darragh !’

‘Then she must have pauperized herself to do it. Yes, to be sure ! It's the very sum poor Killeen left her. Mackiver, my sister cannot take this money ; it's too great, too complete a sacrifice for one girl to accept from another ; and there's more than the money sacrifice involved in it, as your father points out,’ he says significantly.

‘It's done with the noblest intention, of that I'm sure,’ Ronald says dejectedly.

‘And it's nobly executed, too ; but we must get Miss Thynne to reverse her decision against herself. I will write to her, and you must add your words of wisdom—and of love, old man !’ Robert Annesley says, swishing away at some thistle-heads which are audaciously showing themselves in the terrace border.

'She has refused me definitely enough. I shall never dare my fate in that quarter again,' Ronald confesses, and something like a gloom settles on Mr. Annesley's brow as he listens. Can it be that Captain Mackiver is going to have the audacity to propose himself once again as a suitable alliance to Dolly?

'I think you're right about Miss Thynne,' Mr. Annesley says, with an air of set purpose in his speech which is like a nettle-sting to his auditor; 'it's never well to attempt to renew or resuscitate a love-affair. Something invariably crops up to remind you that there has been a want of something that has made it wise to have done with one another. I should say to a son, if I had one: Never try to be on with an old love if once you've been off with her.'

'You're not encouraging, Annesley.'

'My dear fellow, I didn't imagine that you wanted to be "encouraged" to go out and ask for another definite refusal from Miss Thynne.'

'I was not thinking of Miss Thynne when I said you were not encouraging. She has killed the wild, desperate feeling that I had for her; it was more than love, it was madness, and—she has taught me to combat it. I was thinking of Dolly; I shall subject myself to false suspicions—you're not the only one who will think hardly of me, Annesley—but I shall leave it to Dolly to decide what our future relations are to be.'

'I will not interfere with her decision,' Mr. Annesley says shortly; but in spite of this voluntary promise of non-interference Captain Mackiver feels that Dolly's brother is opposed to the idea of a renewal of old ties between his sister and Captain Mackiver.

Dolly is standing in the dining-room when they go in, obeying her graceful instinct to make a sort of festa of the

day which has brought such good tidings to her by decorating the prettily-arranged dinner-table with flowers and foliage.

Kathleen's offering of lobster and fish and eggs is not one of necessity to their needs, but rather a tribute of gratitude for the unswerving sympathy which the Annesleys have displayed towards her during the term of her lover's incarceration. He is a free man now, having come out of his trial 'without a stain on his character,' and the feeling for him is so strong in the neighbourhood that the latter has relented towards the English usurpers at Darragh to the extent of serving them with the necessaries of life again. For they 'stood by the poor boy and befriended his sweetheart while he was under a cloud.' And so the warm, romance-loving, naturally-grateful national heart has gone out to the Annesleys at last to the extent of selling them whatever they want to buy at exorbitant prices.

It is late enough in the autumn to justify artificial light at seven o'clock in the evening, and Dolly has half-a-dozen candles ablaze on the large round table, in tall straight silver candlesticks that gleam out with genuine artistic effect from amidst the flowers and ferns. She has dressed herself, too, with a more careful and studied regard for effect than she has been displaying lately. Altogether Robert Annesley sees that the signs of the times portend that he is not to keep his sister to himself much longer.

'Has Ronald told you his father's news?' she asks, with a bright warm blush, as they seat themselves at the table when Robert has said the grace which, to do him justice, is not one whit more fervent and reverent than it was in those Boycotted days, when it was frequently only potatoes and a herring that they had to be grateful for.

'He has, and it has surprised and touched me greatly,' her brother says gravely. 'Miss Thynne has made us her

debtors for ever by her *intention*, which we must not permit her to carry out.'

'Is it Darragh?' Dolly cries, in an ecstasy of amazement — 'is it Darragh? and I never to think of her! Of course it is Darragh! Who else would be so good and generous and unselfish? But I can't take it; she must be made to have it back, and you must be the one to make her!' she adds, turning suddenly to Captain Mackiver.

'I have no right to interfere, nor had I any reason for suggesting Miss Thynne as the probable donor; your brother knows as much of the matter as I do from my father's letter, which he has read, and which contains all the information I have on the subject; but, like you, Dolly, I feel that no one but Darragh would be so good, and generous and unselfish.'

'It's an attempt to commit social suicide which we must not stand tamely by and witness,' Mr. Annesley says conclusively. 'But until we know more for a certainty we can do nothing. It has not entered into your mind to take the money, Dolly?'

'Certainly it did, until you suggested that Darragh was ruining herself to give it to me,' Dolly replies frankly. 'I hoped when I heard it first that it might be from one of my dear mother's numerous cousins; you know she had rich relatives, Robert.'

'Not one of whom would present you with ten thousand pounds,' he answers. 'I can't encourage you to hope that you will be able to keep it, dear; make up your mind to surrender it without flinching.'

'I've given up more than that without flinching,' Dolly says, in a low voice, and Captain Mackiver, who catches the words and their meaning, vows that whether Dolly is to be rich or poor he will ask her again to be his wife.

Other people—her brother, for instance, among them—may despise and distrust him for his vacillation. But Dolly, who has never wavered herself, will have mercy on a waverer, and that other one shall have the joy of knowing that her work is of avail.

Troublesome letters have come to Mr. Annesley by the late post, which fact may account for his looking with severity on Captain Mackiver's hopes. London creditors have become impatient, and Marian is full of trepidation and discontent.

'I feel that there is nothing left for me to do but to go over and face these cormorants who have been feeding on poor Marian,' he says to his sister, when he has finished his letters; 'then I must get her away—by that time she'll be ready enough to come here, I suspect.'

He goes out of the room saying this, and Captain Mackiver is resolved to try the effect of a few words in season.

'Come out in the garden, Dolly. I want to say something to you.'

Without a word she gets her hat and shawl and goes out with him. They turn away from the terrace walk and get into the wilder outskirts of the grounds, and here he tells his tale.

'Let the money go without a thought, but let us fulfil what was the intention of the one who has given you the money, Dolly; her object is to see us man and wife, her happiness will be in seeing us settled and happy; and after all, dear, we shall be happier together than we can ever either of us be apart. I don't often quote poetry,' the young Scotchman says, with a grim smile; 'but I remember some lines that hit the mark exactly—"If thou canst love again, again love me; take me for what I am; no hero! but a man! still loving thee."''

‘Yes; as far as I am concerned, the lot you offer me is the dearest in life, according to my idea,’ faithful Dolly says, casting all dignified restrictions and everything but truth to the winds. ‘But there are others—your father and mother won’t like a poor wife for you, Ronald. Poverty isn’t exactly the unpardonable sin, but it’s the insurmountable obstruction in their eyes.’

‘I think you must promise to try and surmount them with me,’ Ronald says; and then he puts his arms round Dolly, and as he kisses her truly and tenderly he feels that the fever in his heart has abated for ever, and that here is rest on the brave, strong breast that has never known a pulsation for any other than himself.

They talk about Darragh a good deal this night, and come to the conclusion that she must be sought at once, and made acquainted with their plan for a contented, reasonable, happy future. And then they go in, and Dolly tells her brother so quietly how they have settled things that Mr. Annesley is not ready with a rebuff either in words or manner.

‘You’ll have pinching times till I can pay you back the money you lent me, I fear, dear,’ he says kindly; ‘but meanwhile you must make Miss Thynne take back her gift openly. Neither Mackiver nor you could be happy at her expense.’

Mr. Annesley has been three or four days in town before he can give a moment’s thought to the conduct of his sister’s case. He has faced the ignominious difficulties into which his wife’s weak extravagance has placed him like a man. That is to say, he has not reproached her for what is past, but he has given her to understand that for the future she must be contented to bear her share of the burden of retrenchment, and make up her mind to have finally done

with playing with the fringe of fashionable society. In return for her perfect acquiescence in this arrangement, and solemn promise to comply with it, he has undertaken to give up his Utopian scheme of living at and improving Darragh, has agreed to sell that picturesque white elephant if he can find a purchaser for it, and has voluntarily offered to return to town and recommence a practice on a much humbler scale than the one he left.

Accordingly, he advertises for an agent or intelligent bailiff to live in the house at Darragh and superintend the property, and wisely states that the claims of those who will be '*lenient to the tenantry*' will be the only ones considered.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

BEST FOR HER.

THERE is a good deal of low and deep, heartfelt, and perhaps rather unreasonable rejoicing in the neighbourhood when it is known all over the demesne and around its borders that the English proprietor, who so meanly and basely bought and paid for it, and was so righteously ruined upon it, is not coming back again.

There is to be a great auction at Darragh, and it is astonishing to see the eagerness displayed by those who are indigenous to the soil, to obtain some sort of memento of the man whom they have driven from it. But their eagerness does not take a form that is remunerative for the seller. For they overhaul the things on the view day, and arrange with one another as to what they shall bid for, and when the bidding is to stop. They do this with such skill and caution,

that the furniture, which cost some thousands, goes for a mere song, and is distributed in an incongruous way that will bring the suspicion of theft upon some of the descendants of those who have purchased it in the avenging future.

Darragh is deserted and empty. Deserted, save for the presence of Mrs. Powles, who remains in the kitchen with a goodly number of pots and pans, and who avows, with an air of pride, dashed with mystery, that she is specially engaged for the service of the new agent. And 'empty,' with the exception of three rooms on the ground-floor, which are left in comfortable, not to say luxurious, order, for the use of the person who is coming as Robert Annesley's representative to rule at Darragh.

Dolly Annesley has gone back to England, and is her brother's guest in Welbeck Street until such time as the preparations for her marriage are completed.

These preparations are going on apace now, for—as in spite of all the Annesleys' inquiries nothing has transpired with regard to the source from whence Dolly's ten thousand pounds has sprung—it has been settled that she may take and use it honourably. Even her brother has ceased his opposition, and has counselled her to banish all scruples, assuring her that he is 'quite satisfied now,' and refusing to tell her the source of his satisfaction.

But all this time Dolly fails to meet with Darragh, and this is the one drop of infelicity in the cup of the bride-elect. The Thornes have gone abroad, so have Lord and Lady Killeen, but no one who may be presumed to know seems sure, when questioned on the point, as to whether Miss Thynne has accompanied either of these couples or not.

'You don't seem perplexed or frightened about her?' Dolly says to her brother one day, and he replies :

‘Well, to tell the truth, I am neither perplexed nor frightened. You’ll meet her again some day, I’ve no doubt, Dolly ; meantime, be satisfied.’

‘If I could know that it was well with her, I should be satisfied, but I can’t stand this uncertainty.’

‘It is well with her, be assured of that.’

‘Then you know where she is and what she is doing?’

‘I am not going to tell you more than this ; wherever she is, she is there by her own will and wish, and what she is doing is a work that is thoroughly congenial to her.’

‘Will you tell me all you know about her on my wedding-day?’

‘No ; because you’re such a fearfully prosaic young person that you’re quite capable of taking Ronald off to spend the honeymoon with Miss Thynne by way of making things pleasant for all three ; but when you come back and are safely quartered somewhere, I will tell you.’

Sunnier days seem to be dawning for the Annesleys. A cheque has come from Lord Killeen for his wife’s share of the expenses of the co-operative housekeeping, and as this cheque has been drawn in a spirit of the widest liberality, Mrs. Annesley’s embarrassments are virtually at an end.

Moreover, with the ardour which always distinguishes him, Mr. Annesley flings himself with all his heart and power into the work of regaining his place in his profession. Among other things he competes for a professorship at one of the hospitals, obtains it, and through it gains a number of private pupils by whom he is largely remunerated, and almost completely absorbed.

His numerous avocations leave him little time to think about, much less to bemoan, Darragh, that fair Irish property which tempted the eye and turned to ashes on the lips. When he does give a thought to it, he reflects with

satisfaction that at least the people are happy under the gentle sway of one for whom they have a loyal love that is traditional among them, and that, therefore, it is as likely to last as anything is in their versatile breasts.

There is a soberness about the bliss of the re-engaged pair that is quite in keeping with the Mackivers' view of such things. The old people are quite ready now to smile approval upon any sensible manifestation of affection for Ronald which Dolly feels disposed to make, but at the same time it gratifies them to observe that there is more of the calm, undemonstrative established regard of the wife than the fluctuating fondness of the *fiancée* about Dolly.

'Their affection is founded on a rock; it has been severely shaken, but it is founded on a rock now,' Mrs. Mackiver observes piously, and she omits to mention that the rock she alludes to is Dolly's ten thousand pounds.

It is a quiet wedding, according to Dolly's express desire. Her brother and his wife go to an unfashionable church with her, and there she meets Ronald, accompanied by his father and mother and sister, and without further let or hindrance Ronald Mackiver and Dorothy Annesley are made one.

The end of the old free life, the beginning of the new married one, has come, and to each of them it seems strange now that they should either of them have ever anticipated anything different. The old plan mooted first in the old Weybridge and Walton days has been carried out in all its entirety, and the Darragh episode seems like a dream—a dream from which both Ronald and Dolly are well satisfied to wake to the safer, surer realities of their present life.

This is the poetry of it. The prose—that which they have to do presently—is rather different.

Not 'unpleasantly' different altogether, but rugged in the

rhythm. As soon as they come back from the fortnight's trip to Scotland, which they take more for the sake of making Dolly acquainted with some of Ronald's kinsfolk than from any insatiable desire for seeing beautiful scenery, the order comes for Captain Mackiver's company to start for India, and Dolly prepares to accompany him.

Prepares with an amount of cheerful composure that it tries Robert Annesley rather hardly to witness ; for he has not found that simply perfect congeniality of disposition and habit in his wife which might have reconciled him even to the loss of a sister such as Dolly has been.

It 'tries' Mrs. Annesley too, but for a very different reason. Her sentiments of impatience on the point are aroused on account of Dolly's *trousseau* !

'It is a model one for this climate, and now it is practically useless, and I can't take it off your hands, because you're shorter and stouter than I am ; otherwise I should have rejoiced in the opportunity of filling my wardrobe again ; this season *has* taken it out of my dresses so dreadfully, and Robert wouldn't have grumbled at the expense, because it would have been incurred in the cause of accommodating his sister,' she says to Dolly, who lets the aspersions on her height and slimness pass, and merely answers the business part of the speech.

'I shall get Madame Beatrice to take back a number of my dresses ; she's a good old thing, and won't extort much from my misfortune in having inappropriate things for this Indian occasion,' Dolly laughs.

'Well, I *hope* you'll find her as accommodating as you anticipate. My experience of those people is that they impose upon you at every turn. It would have been much nicer if our figures had been more alike ; then I would have taken your dresses off your hands without hesitation.'

‘Never mind,’ Dolly says buoyantly. She cannot bring herself to regret not being modelled after the fashion of her sister-in-law.

‘But you see you are shorter and stouter,’ Marian persists. Slimness is one of the many excellent points in her favour which Mrs. Annesley likes to have constantly recognised.

‘And even if they fitted you it would be a pity for you to take them, as you don’t want them,’ Dolly says good humouredly; but Mrs. Annesley assures her that *that* consideration wouldn’t stop her in her amiable design if only their figures had been more alike.

But though Dolly is quite equable, not to say indifferent, about her dresses, she is not either of these things about Darragh.

‘The time has come for you to keep your promise, Robert,’ she says to her brother when the first flush of excitement consequent on the receipt of the marching orders has passed off.

‘I’ve made a good many to you in my time. Which is it now, Dolly?’ he says affectionately.

‘You promised to tell me where Darragh was when we were “safely quartered somewhere;” as that “somewhere” is to be India, won’t you tell me now? You must tell me now.’

‘She is my agent at Darragh.’

Dolly almost gasps :

‘At Darragh! *Alone* in such danger! Oh, Robert, how could you know this and suffer it?’

‘She’s happier than she has been for months, and safe as a saint in a shrine.’

‘I shall go and see her before we go to India,’ Dolly says firmly, for already she reads opposition to her scheme in her brother’s face, and she has need of all her firmness before she can bring herself to thwart Robert.

‘Your time is pretty well cut out for you before you leave for India,’ he says, a little impatiently. ‘Be sensible, Dolly. Ronald has too much to do to go with you, and, indeed, your time belongs to him now; there’s his kit to look after, and a thousand things will crop up before you can make a clear start.’

‘Going to see Darragh is one of the thousand things—the chiefest and best,’ Dolly says determinedly. ‘Ronald will come too. Whatever and whoever is neglected, Darragh must never be by us. We owe her more than we can ever pay, and I love her more than I can ever say.’

‘I think that a visit from Ronald and you will be more embarrassing than pleasing,’ Mr. Annesley protests; ‘the girl has got into a groove there, and it’s one that she runs in smoothly and pleasantly. But she will remember other things, the days of her triumph, the excitement her beauty and fashion always made around her, the havoc she caused—all these things she will remember when she sees you, and perhaps she will regret them.’

‘And you may lose your agent, and she may come back to London and create more havoc, and be a peeress, is that your fear, Robert?’

‘No! but she may wish she had kept her ten thousand pounds and Ronald Mackiver,’ Mr. Annesley says; and at this Dolly blushes a little, not with anger at the idea of its being taken for granted that Ronald Mackiver has ever been Darragh’s to keep, but with generous regret that her brother should deem her capable of fearing that Darragh may become retrospective.

‘Ronald and I will run all risks for the sake of seeing Darragh once again,’ Dolly tells him; and though Mr. Annesley feels inclined to sneer at the sentimentality which is prepared to incur unnecessary expense for no good end,

he refrains from doing so because Dolly is thoroughly in earnest in her ardent desire to once more see the face of her friend.

But when young Mrs. Mackiver moots the plan to her husband—to Ronald, who has to her certain knowledge thrilled at the sound of Darragh's name and the tone of Darragh's voice—he is most prosaically reasonable about it.

'Of course I should be glad to see Miss Thynne, dear,' he says impressively; 'nothing would give me greater pleasure than to take you over there and have a few days with your old friend in her new character of agent, but it's not to be done, Dolly—it's not to be done, I assure you. In the first place I can't get leave.'

'Oh, Ronald! so you said once before when going to Ireland was on the cards; but you got it then because *you* wanted to see Darragh.'

'Well?' he half-interrogates, with a laugh.

'Well! get it now because I want to see her.'

And he gets it.

It is night at Darragh, night with leaden darkness in the sky and over the wild sea, that hurls itself tumultuously upon the coast of Galway. The outside air is raw and cold, damping and depressing, but in the big hall at Darragh all is light, brightness, and warmth.

A big wood fire blazes ruddily on the hearth, and around it several settles are drawn, and on these settles are seated Ferroll's wife and children, Kathleen and her lover, and several others who belong to the Darragh demesne. Ferroll himself has been convicted of manslaughter, and relegated to other climes, but Miss Thynne has taken his wife by the hand, and forced her to take the position of hamlet school-mistress. For Mrs. Ferroll has been a pet of the priest's, and has learnt to read and write, and cast up accounts;

and now her little learning proves to be a real boon and blessing to herself, and not the dangerous thing it is sometimes accredited with being.

For by means of it she can keep her children decently fed and clothed ; and to give them no cause to regret that they have been brought into the world is now her chief—indeed her only—aim.

For, as she says, poor thing ! ‘They’ve worse than no father—the Lord preserve him !’

Darragh is giving them a little entertainment to-night, little thinking what entertainment there is in store for herself later on. She has invited them to a supper of good meat and bread and beer, and she has given the men (and many of the women too) tobacco to take to their homes for their comfort presently. Meantime, she is reading to them, gratifying their dramatic instincts with all her own dramatic power.

She is well in the middle of the Players’ Scene from *Hamlet*, and her audience, rendered doubly intelligent by the physical refreshment which has preceded this mental one, are listening to her with critical interest and devout attention. It appeals to their dramatic instinct of revenge for injuries done, this subtle scheme of Hamlet’s ‘to touch the conscience of the King,’ and they are all leaning forward, with eyes and minds widely open to catch and understand every inflection of the clear and sympathetic voice that is addressing them, when the now unfamiliar sound of wheels on the drive outside distracts their attention, and brings Darragh to a halt. This is how they see her ! This the way in which she will present herself before their mind’s eye for many a year to come !

Here, at rest among the people whose cry for aid and sympathy she has always heard and always responded to,

helping them, humanizing them, encouraging them ! Here they see the girl whom Ronald has loved with the most passionate love of which his heart is capable, the woman from whose hand he has been willing to receive the gift and blessing of a good wife ; and, seeing her thus, they feel that it is best for her that thus it should be.

She does not meet them without emotion, emotion in which a little pain is blended with much pleasure. A woman does not surrender her heart's desire and her fortune at the same time to her rival, however dear that rival may be to her friendly heart, without experiencing many a soul-sickening qualm. And Darragh is no Stoic. She is only a gallant-hearted girl, with a power of resolution and endurance about her that is rare ; and so now, when she meets these two whom she has helped to join together, there are some very womanly tears of mingled pleasure and pain in her eyes.

But these she dries presently, banishing them with smiles that are as unforced as the tears, and calling Powles to her council, prepares to make them welcome to Darragh after their long journey. But, with the discretion that her knowledge of the national character has taught her, she takes care that these preparations do not interfere with the comfort of her other guests.

‘ They mustn't feel that they are not wanted, the dangerous darlings ! sorrow has made them so sensitive,’ she explains pathetically, and the Mackivers grasp the situation and, for the sake of smoothing the thorny path which she is treading for their sakes, fling themselves into *Hamlet*, and read respectively the stirring and thrilling speeches of the Prince of Denmark and Ophelia, crowning themselves with laurels by the deed, and causing the hearts of their audience to relent in the matter of this new invasion.

'You will be with Ronald, so I won't pity you for going to India,' Darragh says, when the day comes for Dolly to leave her; 'and as for me, I shall have time to get restful and to think of you both as my dearest friends, who have never been anything *more* or *less* than friends to me.'

'You have been more than a friend to me; but has it been the best kindness to Ronald that you should have given him me instead of yourself?' Dolly questions.

'My dear child, when a man has been married six months he appreciates the woman who makes him *comfortable*! A sweetheart with ideas is interesting, but when she becomes a wife her ideas get in the way of her lord's pleasure at times, and then are pronounced ridiculous or improper; now I shall always have ideas, and Ronald would have been unhappy or, at any rate, cross when they clashed with him—no as it is is best for me.'

CHAPTER XXXVII.

'A NOBLE LADY AND THE PEOPLE LOVED HER MUCH!'

A FEW months pass away in comparative quiet in the most distressful country that ever yet was seen, and then there comes a startling change in the political horizon. One Ministry goes out abruptly, but not ingloriously, and another comes in, and the Marquis of Portbank is 'spoken of' for Ireland.

His best friends and warmest admirers are surprised at the way in which this noble young Croesus has cultivated himself up to the mark of political notoriety. That since his rejection by Darragh Thynne he has thrown himself with enthusiasm into the ranks of those who do real work in the

House, everybody knows. But everybody is amazed when he utters a speech on the Irish difficulty which proves that he has studied and mastered—or nearly mastered—his subject. And this he has done for love of Darragh ! Verily women are at the root of all the good as well as of a little of the evil that is done in this world.

‘Portbank for Ireland !’ Darragh is more touched, more gratified, more hopeful for the country’s future than she has been for years when the whisper grows into a report that is well founded. The motive which has originally inspired him may or may not have been the loftiest in the world, but it has spurred him on to this : that he comes to his high office with a mind filled with knowledge of, and a heart full of sympathy for, the people whom he is called upon to govern in the name of our Sovereign Lady.

And if another than Her Gracious Majesty, Victoria Regina, is in reality the queen of his soul, the one for whose pleasure and pride he has qualified himself to be Viceroy of Ireland, what matter ? He *has* qualified himself, and the reason for his having done so may remain a secret to himself and—that one for whose sake he has done it.

The new Viceroy reaches Dublin and is installed at the castle before Darragh, in her remote home in the west, knows that the ‘spoken about’ honour is an accomplished fact. When she does hear the news her first impulse is to kneel and pray that he may be gifted with grace from above to do his duty to the people over whom he is set right nobly, and she thinks that her prayer will be answered.

‘He is in his place, I in mine ; both striving for the same end, both brought to regard the same end as “the best we can achieve” through suffering and disappointment,’ she tells herself one day as she is riding home on her wild high-

spirited pony ‘Banshee’ from a long tour of inspection over the most remote part of the demesne.

She is handsomer than ever. Pure air and the sense of right doing have wrought the usual beneficial results, and Darragh’s health and spirits are far higher than they have ever been. Bravely and buoyantly she faces the future, which is to be an arduous and isolated one for her, and eagerly and earnestly she plans how best she can utilise it for the good of others !

‘He is in his place as ruler over thousands who will have cause to bless or curse him as he uses his opportunities and privileges ; I in mine as the help and stepping-stone to better things to these few who will go astray if my guiding hand is not a firm one,’ she tells herself, as she rides up to the door at Darragh, and thinks of the Marquis of Portbank in all his vice-regal state in the castle in Dublin.

‘A gentleman is waiting to see you, Miss Darragh,’ Powles says, rather fretfully, advancing to meet her young mistress. ‘If I’d a known he’d been coming I’d have made it convenient to have something better than fish cakes for dinner ; but there you are, Miss Darragh, you’re satisfied with anything, and my hand is getting out of the way of cooking things as them I’ve lived with before would always have things cooked.’

‘A gentleman to see *me* ?’ Darragh says incredulously. Then she tells herself it ‘must be either Mr. Annesley or Killeen,’ and goes forward hilariously to meet him.

The blood rushes through her veins with the force of a mountain torrent when she sees that it is the Viceroy who has sought her in these wilds.

A stammering welcome, a few inappropriate words is all the greeting he gets. But it fully satisfies him, seemingly. It augurs better for his hopes than if Darragh were quite calm and self-possessed.

‘Your being here makes me afraid that you have heard rumours of further disaffection in these regions!’ she says, and then she adds earnestly, ‘Do believe me! they are not true; there was no need for you to come!’

‘I quite believe you, but I hope the end will prove that I was right in coming,’ he says good-humouredly. ‘Please to forget that I am anything official; think of me solely as your old and true friend.’

‘I always have thought of you as true,’ she says softly, ‘very true and very good, and so I’m glad you’ve come to Ireland for all our sakes.’

‘You know for whose sake I first grew interested in Ireland?’

‘Lord Portbank, I was a poor inducement for you to go the right way; but as you’ve taken it so readily and well, I’m very, very glad.’

‘“Thou drawest me, thou drawest me,”’ he quotes, and a proud throb in her heart tells Darragh that she ‘is a woman, therefore to be won!’

‘Don’t you finish your work?’ he asks her before he takes his departure, and Darragh will not feign to misunderstand him.

‘If I can do it well! Yes!’ she says simply, and the Lord-Lieutenant goes back to Dublin an engaged man—pledged to marry one of the sweetest, bravest, best, and most reliable of Irishwomen.

Such news is not kept secret long. All the world wonders at it in a few days. People who like her say that Portbank played his cards well, and deserves the success he has attained. They also say that ‘the law of compensation works fairly well in his case, for if the land over which he is set to rule is difficult to manage, and direfully detrimental to the repose of those who undertake the manage-

ment of it, he will have the aid and sympathy of one of the fairest of that land's daughters.’

On the other hand, people who don't like her say that *she* has played her cards cleverly, luring him on to undertake uncongenial work, in order that he may feel that he needs her to help him to carry it out.

Mrs. St. John, who means to write an Irish novel when the time is ripe, and also means to be in the Castle set in Dublin before she attempts a national picture of the times, paragraphs the forthcoming event in the best society papers with much skill and discretion, and takes good care that Darragh shall know to whom she is indebted for these honourable mentions.

And the telegraph wires flash the news to India, where Ronald and Dolly are doing their best to conduce to the honour and glory of our Empire in the East.

‘Marchioness of Portbank and Lady-Lieutenant of Ireland!’ Dolly says, in an ecstasy of delight, ‘and our own dear Darragh still! Ronald, this makes our happiness complete, doesn't it?’

‘It's a perilously high place! I hope her head won't get turned,’ Captain Mackiver says soberly. To tell the truth, good man and just as he is, faithful and fond as he is of Dolly, his feeling of delight in Darragh's promotion is tempered by regret that Portbank should have made her forget him (Ronald Mackiver). Accordingly he looks as if he thought Dolly's elation undue and exaggerated, and utters truisms to the effect that Darragh's will be a ‘perilously high place.’

And Lady Killeen hears it as she is winging her way back from the Continent. Her ladyship is pausing in Paris for the pleasure of contrasting her present life with her past one. Lord Killeen is not with her, not that they have

quarrelled again, but they have agreed that life apart from one another will be a more agreeable thing for each of them than perpetual companionship. So Lord Killeen goes yachting, and his wife makes his name heard in the capitals of Europe. Photographers solicit the favour of sittings from her without ceasing, and she poses as a professional beauty with the youngest and fairest women of the day.

It pleases her well that Darragh is to be the practical queen of Ireland. For Darragh has a generous soul, and having once extended the hand of companionship to her cousin's wife she will not hastily withdraw it, or indeed withdraw it at all, unless strong provocation be offered to her. So in common with her quondam friend Mrs. St. John, Lady Killeen determines to disport herself in the 'Castle set' in Dublin, and to be seen by the eyes of all men as the intimate friend of the Marchioness of Portbank.

Various conjectures are afloat as to the how and where the Lord-Lieutenant and Miss Thynne will be married, and mendacious rumours are promulgated as to the number of her bridesmaids, and the glories of the approaching ceremony. Darragh's real intentions on the subject shall be unfolded by herself!

Breakfast is nearly over in the Mackivers' house in Russell Square, and the old lady, with elevated eyebrows, and in a voice that has more northern burr than usual in it, is reading aloud a preliminary description of the marriage in high life which is to shake so much of the world as knows Darragh to its centre.

'We hear that the bridesmaids will be fourteen in number, and that they are to be some of the most beautiful members of an aristocracy that is world-renowned for its grace and beauty,' the old lady reads raspingly, her head quivering with virtuous reprobation of the enormity of such extravagance.

'Fourteen bridesmaids ! It's as wicked a waste as there was when Dolly's brother was married !' she says, looking piercingly at her daughter, who is not evincing satisfactory signs of disapproval.

'The bridesmaids won't waste in their work, mother ; fourteen pretty young ladies won't cost more to get together than an ugly family party, and you were wanting to call all our plain relations to Ronald's wedding,' Mary says bluntly.

'They would have been our own kith ; these fourteen young ladies can't be all cousins to the groom and the bride,' Mrs. Mackiver persists.

'Our own kith are not the ones about whom I shouldn't count the cost. It will be a beautiful wedding, this of Miss Thynne's, mother, a beautiful bride and a good one too ; I shall go to the church and stand somewhere to get a smile from her sweet face after she's made a wife.'

'You'll not demean yourself to go where you're not invited !' Mrs. Mackiver says, bristling with Scotch pride. 'We come of as good a race as the young lady, and if she hadn't a face that bewitches the men, poor fools, she might have been poorer and humbler than you are this day.'

'You forget, mother, that she made herself poor in order that your son might keep his word of honour, and not feel the pinch of poverty,' Mary says severely, and just as she says it there comes a sounding knock at the door.

'Visitors already, and we've not breakfasted yet !' the old lady says, bustling to the window and peeping through the blinds in the vain desire to catch a suggestive glimpse of the untoward guest. But all she sees is a quiet little brougham, and she is turning away from the window with perplexity and disappointment written on her face when Miss Thynne is announced, and Darragh is in their midst once more.

'We thought you were too great a lady ever to think of

us again,' Mrs. Mackiver says, telling out the fear that her highly sensitive nature had evolved out of her *own* consciousness in her agitation. And Darragh says :

' I am not a greater lady than I have always been, I hope ; but I am going to be the wife of a man who has made himself great in my eyes through his goodness ; and I want Mary to be my first bridesmaid. I have no sister, you know, and next to Dolly I care most for you, Mary !'

' She won't match the beautiful young ladies,' the truth-telling mother says unflatteringly. But Darragh only laughs at this, and Mary is not offended at it.

' There will be no one to match her in goodness and honesty and beauty of heart,' Darragh says affectionately, for her love for Ronald's sister is founded on a rock.

It is a grand wedding, such a wedding as befits the high place of the bridegroom, but homely, quiet Mary Mackiver does not feel at all out of place at it, for she *knows* Darragh better than anyone else.

Knows her better than ever absent Dolly did, and feels that if honour had not stood in the way Darragh would have gone more gladly to the altar with Ronald Mackiver than she is now going with the Marquis of Portbank, good man and true as the latter is.

But her heart is full of warmth and happiness and hope for the weal of the land over which he is destined to rule. And her history cannot be ended in these pages better than by quoting the following words :

' And she grew a noble lady,
And the people loved her much.'

THE END.

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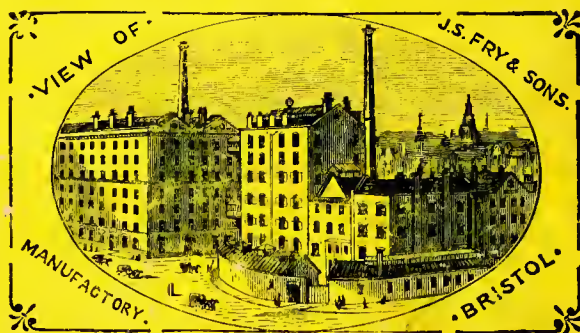
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